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in DIDSBURY

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FIFTY YEARS PUBLIC WORK
IN DIDSBURY



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An anonymous amateur artist and awfully argumentative antiquary abruptly approaches and artfully adumbrates an astonishingly attenuated alderman and absurdly antiquated author

FIFTY YEARS
PUBLIC WORK
IN DIDSBURY
THE EVOLUTION OF A VILLAGE
FROM 1500 TO 15,000 PEOPLE

By
FLETCHER MOSS
OF
THE OLD PARSONAGE
DIDSBURY, ESQUIRE
A Justice of the Peace for
The County Palatine of Lancaster

Meminisse juvo

Published by the Author from his Home
where he has dwelt for more than 50 years

May 1915

The price per copy is 5s. though the cost is nearer 10s.

03057795
08350474
L000269727



Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
at the Ballantyne Press, Edinburgh

Preface

Happy he whom neither wealth nor want
Nor the march of the encroaching city
Drives an exile
From the hearth of his ancestral homestead
We cannot buy the old associations.

PUBLIC work—what is public work? What is work? It may be another form of play, occupation, or amusement, and when does it become public work? The question puzzled me when I began to write this small book. It is commonly understood to refer to the work of a Local Board or a Council, but I was doing public work in Didsbury before there was any Local Board or Council; and at the time of writing this the most important work all over the realm is the raising of the navy and army to defend our country. Well, I joined the local company of the Cheshire Rifle Volunteers, fully equipped without any expense to the country, fifty-five years ago.

This one will make the number of books that I have written into a dozen: are they public work? They have gone forth into all lands wherever the English language is spoken: New Zealand, Australia, India, South Africa, Egypt, Argentina, Berlin, Pittsburg, and many places in the States and Canada. They have brought pilgrims thousands of miles to see where they were written: Latter Day Saints inquiring about their ancestors who were buried in Didsbury long ago, so that on their return to the Great Salt Lake they could there be rebaptized, "total immershun," for every ancestor that I could tell them of. Surely, these books are public work, though I write no more about them in this one. This one must be mainly autobiographical: it is impossible for it to be otherwise. If the public don't like it they have no need to read it. It is another bit of public work that I have done for pleasure, my own

amusement, a contribution to the history of the village, and possibly an encouragement to others who may be desirous to work for their fellows but are deterred by the tumult and the scandals. "Be thou chaste as ice and pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

I never entered into any public work with the idea of making money by it. Only a fool would do that. Even my books were not written for money. I did not begin public work to serve the public. "I fought for my own hand." Having been drawn or plunged into public work a time or two I went on with it partly for fighting's sake, partly for company's sake, gradually growing more and more interested in it, until, when able to do so, I gave up private business and for the last twenty years have worked heart and soul, never missing a council meeting, with incessant daily work for the public, realizing that public work like "virtue is its own reward." Of the many things here written done in Didsbury during more than fifty years, and numberless other things that are not here recorded, I can truthfully say "Quorum pars fui."



Dates of Acts and Facts

A.D.		PAGE
1861	A Volunteer Rifleman, 26th Company Cheshire Rifle Volunteers	9
1862-75	Honorary Treasurer of Didsbury Cricket Club and Athletic Sports	24
1870-72	Churchwarden, Didsbury Church	18
1876-79	Cheadle, Didsbury, and Manchester four-horse coach	25
1884	Bought the Old Parsonage, Clerk's House, and Cock Inn	28-36
1885	Trustee for Allotment Gardens	39
1888-91	Contentions with the Withington Local Board .	40-45
1891-94	Elected Member of the Withington Local Board	45-50
1895-1904	Elected Member of the Withington Urban District Council	50-86
1895	Settled Council's Quarrel about Trams	53-55
1896	Trustee of Didsbury National School	99-102
1898-9	Chairman of Withington Urban District Council	57
1899	The Fight over the Poor's Field	58-69
1899	Re-election strenuously opposed with "Beer and Bible," Club and Church, by Moore, Bentham & Company	62-66
1903	Appointed a Justice of the Peace for the County Palatine of Lancaster by the Chancellor of the Duchy on the nomination of the Earl of Derby	74-79
1904	Amalgamation of the Withington District with the City of Manchester, first proposed by me in 1899; arranged in 1904	79-86
1904	First Election of Councillors for the Didsbury Ward of the City of Manchester	88-92
1907-11	Chairman of Committees <i>re</i> Presentation to and Memorial of Dr. Rhodes	95-98
1908	Temporary Library opened	98

A.D.	PAGE
1909 Offer of all my Property in Didsbury to the Corporation of the City to be used for Charitable Purposes after my Death	103-108
1911 Chairman of Coronation Festivities	109-110
1913 Agreement with the Corporation as to the Grange Estate being made into the Fletcher Moss Playing Fields	112-116
1913 The "Restoration" of the Churchyard	117-124
1914 President of Rifle Club	126
1913 Some more History. The Watts Family and } other Old Families in Didsbury	128-144 154-160
1913 Interview with Carnegie: End of the Twenty Years' Fight for a Free Library	145-152
1915 The Library opened	166
1915 Offer of my Property to the South of Stenner Lane at Half its Value if the Corporation would add it to the Fletcher Moss Playing Fields at my Death. The Offer rejected	168-172
Proposed Home for Poor Gentlefolk	176-180
INDEX	183
<hr/>	
A list of other books that I have written, with a summary of the contents of the six books of Pilgrimages to Old Homes	189

In the six books of Pilgrimages are more than 1200 Illustrations from original photographs.

Copies of the four last books, price a guinea each, postage 6d., may be had from the author and publisher,

FLETCHER MOSS, DIDSBURY.

This book has 80 Illustrations.

FIFTY YEARS PUBLIC WORK IN DIDSBURY

THE EVOLUTION OF A VILLAGE FROM
1500 TO 15,000 PEOPLE

AFTER more than fifty years of public work and more than sixty years of well-remembered facts in Didsbury, it seems to me that it is "meet, right, and my bounden duty" that I should express my heartfelt thanks for the long life and the happy home that have there been vouchsafed to me, that I should also give an account of my stewardship, put on record without fear or favour some of the facts that make the history and show the government of a country village that in my recollection has grown from having fewer than fifteen hundred to having more than fifteen thousand people.

Many centuries have been numbered since the historian Matthew Paris found that if historians wrote the truth they offended men, but if they wrote untruths they offended God. That was forcibly brought home to me twenty-five years ago when I wrote a small history of Didsbury. It confronts me with still greater force now that I have been in the forefront of many quarrels and struggles that have arisen in the village.

Contentions will come, especially in any community that by its own will is a progressive community, but when all the strife and the warfare has died away the man who has acted honestly will find that although he

has made enemies, some of them lifelong, bitter enemies, he has made far more friends, lifelong, true friends, that but for his public work he would never have known—

“This above all—to thine own self be true:
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

Lord Rosebery has often told his audiences that they would find more real pleasure and do more good by looking after home affairs, the village green, the parish pump, than they could ever get from Imperial politics, or the quarrels of other nations.

The Didsbury of my youth was a country parish where agriculture was the chief industry, though some handloom weaving struggled on, and some of the houses are now standing where I have seen and heard the working of the looms. Its market town was Stockport, but it was being made into a suburb of Manchester by the building of mansions for the wealthier men of the city, and smaller houses for the grooms, and gardeners, and tradesmen who soon settled on the cheap, sandy land of the moor; now the village of Barlow Moor.

There were no railroads, no trams, no playgrounds, no sewers, no telephones, no gas, no electric light, no town's-water, no resident police, no lawyers, no hospital, no cemetery, only one doctor (and it was said he had had to marry for money three times and ended with twins), no appendicitis, enteritis, neuritis, ptomaine poisoning, or any of the newfangled diseases we hear of nowadays, at least we never heard of them and ignorance was bliss, for we drank of the water from the holy well by the churchyard and had good health; but slanderous statements about that innocent water were my first experience of public affairs.

1858. In those days the government of the parish was mainly in the churchwardens. They were not chosen to be merely ornamental as they now are, but



DIDISBURY IN THE 18TH CENTURY

According to the traditions of the elders.

they were most important and majestic and had various duties they are not trusted with nowadays. In 1858 Messrs. Dorrington and Neville, two very superior, wealthy men who had recently come to the village from Manchester, were churchwardens. They dabbled in science, and said the water from the holy well was shockingly impure, that it ought to be run away in a drain, and town's-water supplied to everyone. A public meeting was called to consider the matter, but hot indignation was aroused. We were all intensely conservative, and were not going to have the lead-pipe water. If the water did come from the churchyard what did that matter? It might have both body and spirit in it; that made it so nutritious and health-giving.

Many of us, we who lived anywhere near the well, attended the meeting and protested. There was a constant flow of water as from a tap, half an inch to an inch in diameter, that had never been known to fail in the longest drought or frost, and that had been the chief supply of water since men dwelt around it.

Here were faithful witnesses—Betty Blomeley, more than ninety years old; Peter Gaskill, Billy Wood, Hannah Thomason, all over eighty, who had never drunk any other water in their lives and were jolly certain that if they had lead-pipe water and studied chemistry Dorrington and Neville would not live to be anywhere near eighty:—and they didn't—one of them died at sixty-two and his wife at forty-six. I forgot the age of the other.

Sam Hampson, another of the neighbours, lived to be ninety-seven, and another Blomeley into his hundredth year: he told me about the catching of an eighteen-pound salmon in the river. I remember being interested in the derivation of the names of our natives. Blomeley probably came from Bloomy-ley. Royle or Ryle, always pronounced Ryle, a cross-tempered man it was not safe to rile. Rudd (the Rudds had been at the Broad Oak



STENNER BROO FARM AND OLD MARY ALDRED
From a water-colour drawing I made in 1860.

for centuries) was a ruddy man: he always killed our pigs and the happy job made him "ruddier than the cherry." The only reason for the name Cash seemed to be the family wanted it.

More than fifty years have gone since the hubbub about the well. There is still a tiny trickle of water, very useful for cattle and sometimes used for sore eyes and other ailments. About a quart a minute comes now. It is difficult to measure, for boys break all spouts. A few years since the flow was six quarts a minute or over 2000 gallons in twenty-four hours.

I was startled recently when reading Sir Norman Lockyer's "Dawn of Astronomy," and Dr. Frazer's "Golden Bough," to find that "holy wells" were generally oriented, and instantly I saw that if anyone held, say, a rickety child for the water of this old well in Stenner Lane to flow upon it, that person would face the east. Anyone standing opposite to the flow of the stream whether for praying, bathing, or baptizing would look towards the rising of the sun as much as if he were in church or in any pagan temple. That is a lingering relic of the worship of the sun, learnt by me after seventy years.

The dispute about water was compromised by each party having its own way. For forty-two years afterwards my mother always had water from the well for dinner and tea, and she lived to be over ninety. We thrived on it, but the other side who had water brought from Manchester in pipes along the high road are all gone long ago.

As time went on they used town's-water to deg the roads when they were dusty. Some people who were particularly pious and penurious declared it to be a wicked thing to do, for if the Almighty wished the roads to be wet He could easily send rain at any time He wished. We should have to pay Manchester for the water, whereas if we were content with what Providence

THE HOLY WELL, DIDSBURY

The water that now wells up flows out of pipes at the gable of the stable where cement shows white in the road.
Some water often wells up lower down, in the middle of the road.



sent we should not only save the money, but we should also save any interference with the will of the Lord.

We did save the flowing waters from being hidden in a drain as so many "holy wells" were destroyed. There was one at St. David's, the Mecca of the Welsh, whither two pilgrimages were as good for body and soul as one to Rome, and where the trout came to be fed by hand, but that was run into a drain. Ours was of great use as late as 1895, for an eight weeks' frost at the beginning of that year froze the water-pipes that were a yard deep in the macadam road and water became very precious. In fact there was one Sunday night at the Cock Inn water had to be fetched from the well or the whisky had to be all drunk neat.

Mr. Watts lately offered to pay for a handsome stone monument over the well if town's-water was supplied at a nominal charge as a drinking fountain, but our water-works committee would not give an intermittent supply for less than five guineas a year, and for the quantity that would probably be used that would be dearer than beer. The comparison is suggested as it has so often been remarked that the brewers in the City Council generally get on the waterworks committee.

Before the agitation in the village about the water there had been one about gas. It would be about 1855. I remember it slightly. Manchester and Stockport wished to supply us with gas, but we, the respectable old Tories, said we did not want the roads lighted with gas, they only wished to make money out of us. Prudent people gave their parties when there was moonlight and we carried lanterns and sticks. If the Almighty who had made the darkness did not approve of it He could easily make another moon or two, or some of those wonderfully bright stars that other countries had.

Now, in March, 1915, after sixty years of gas-lighted streets, we have gone back to primeval darkness, and the young ladies say "How romantic!"

There seemed to be continuous struggles with newcomers who had newfangled notions about many things, and if we had to allow the reformers and radicals who were so fond of prating and lecturing about sanitary schemes and sewers we should soon have our rates up to a shilling in the pound.

My father was of the straitest sect of the Tories : a



A VOLUNTEER RIFLEMAN, 1861

stout upholder of Church and State. Church and something else the vulgar called it ; but as I remember him saying, there were only thirty-three Parliamentary voters in Didsbury (at that time) and twenty-nine of them voted Tory, we were safe. I believe the four sinners were all Dissenters, and James Watts was their ringleader.

1860. A wave of patriotism was sweeping over England from a dread of invasion by the French.

Napoleon III had made Cherbourg into a dagger or pistol, or something pointed at the heart of England, and “the youth of England were on fire. . . . They sell the pasture now to buy the horse”: and we “Yeomen whose limbs were made in England” were told again “to set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide” and fight for “England and St. George.”

Wonderful it is that as I write the youth of Didsbury are going by hundreds into France to fight, but not against the French. “Grim-visaged war” has come with all its horrors.

My father urged me to join the Volunteers, as his father had been in the Yeomanry when the great “Boney” was expected any day. My grey uniform and Enfield rifle cost him £14, and I joined the 26th company of the Cheshire Rifle Volunteers. Tatton, the squire of Wythenshaw, was Captain. Shooting was practised at Gatley Carrs, and to save the long walk round by Cheadle or Northen I sometimes waded the river in the summer time, hanging my boots on the rifle. One afternoon I put a handful of water weed out of a ditch in Gatley Carrs into my pocket for my aquarium, and when separating the weeds in a bowl of water at home out swam a lively jacksharp.

The Rifleman’s song of those days was “Partant pour la Syrie,” or the earlier one of “Jeannette and Jeannot.”

“With the gun upon your shoulder and the bayonet by your side
You’ll be taking some proud lady and be making her your bride.

Oh! if I were Queen of France, or still more Pope of Rome,
I’d have no fighting men abroad; no weeping maids at home.
All the world should be at peace, or if Kings must show their
might

Why let them who make the quarrels be the only men who fight.”

1859. A grand bazaar and flower-show was held in June at our field off Stenner Lane in aid of the building fund for a parsonage house to the lately erected church



BAZAAR IN AID OF A PARSONAGE FOR EMMANUEL CHURCH, 1859

My father is shown just beyond the horses' heads of the carriage to the right.

of Emmanuel, Barlow Moor. My mother, with Mrs. Kidd, the rector's wife, had the most work and management of it. I acted as her cashier and bookkeeper, and did a lot of running about. The net result was a clear profit of more than £500.

Several small sketches of mine are here reproduced from my book on Didsbury. There is one showing the only post office in the parish in the same building as the Cock Inn. This neighbourly business had existed since the dawn of history, or the dawn of the post office, and at one time there was agitation as to whether the Cock Inn should absorb the post office, or



the post office swallow the Cock. There was also a school for the sons of gentlemen kept by a Mr. W. R. Cates. James Watts, junior, and two young Milnes and others attended it, stabling their ponies in the coaching stables.

The Wesleyan College is shown as it was in the days when the doctor advised the governors of the college to build a fives court or playground where the students could have exercise and get into a good sweat, and the solemn old Methody told them the students should go into their chamber and pray till they sweat.

Another little drawing is of the oak tree whose stump still stands near the footpath across* the

Withington Golf Club's ground. It is said there have been two men hanged on this tree. There certainly was one who committed suicide there a few years since, and the tree seemed so depressed at the second sad event that it sickened and died! though it is possible the tree sickened from the language it heard since the once pleasant fields around it were made into a golf course.

The headings of the Parish Registers are copies



WESLEYAN COLLEGE, DIDSBURY

that I made through tracing-paper: the entries below them are not in the order of the originals. Since they were taken the earlier registers have been transcribed by Mr. H. T. Crofton and are printed. Mr. Crofton unfortunately had one of his legs amputated and found pleasure in deciphering and transcribing the parish registers. There were times when I sat by his bedside as he was working at them.

The Boathouse Inn at Northen was on the site of the Tatton Arms. I made a nice water-colour drawing of it with the sun setting behind the mill.

Buryallis. The names of all such persons
As haſt beene buried within the
Chapelrie of Didburie ſince
the firſte yeare of the Queene
Ma^{re}^{des} Raigne Accordinge to the
Newe eccl^siaſticall
Conſtitutions Writte[n] by
Rycharde maſſye Minister therre.

In quarto anno Regni RR^e Elizabethae
Anno 1562 A[do] 1562
Also the daughter of James Wardman w^m 6 d^r 1562
Elabell the daughter of Egomas ffletcher 24 July
Ellin the wyf of Willm Ogoulton 14 d^r february
Parke woodd.
Kathwin the daughter of Rycharde Workme 20.
Jos^w ffletcher do brother woodd
Ellin wyf of william woodd do mitragon } 21°

irishings, £ Dm and the summe of 20 shillings more
1569 Thomas the sonne of John Fletcher
and the daughter of Lawrence Fletcher
and the daughter of Thomas Fletcher }
shee by reason of Domineke Fletcher

Thomas the sonne of Robert Brooke by Elizabeth his wife before
him the daughter of Edward Egerton armes by marrage 20°
in the summe of John Fletcher by Alice Didsbury 17°
from the daughter of Richard Lacy 16°

this same was trespall of bloodie warre betwixt hym & chawles
his parliament & Manchester was besieged the 25 of this
yere & his booke was plundered by E: Wh: w: ranged by blanke
liz D of John Cock of Didsbury Christened
as they call it by a Dissenter.

September the 27 1665

I have of Tho: Walker of
Didsbury eight shillings booneys }
Collected for Stillinge Fleet } 8d
and a fift shalles was thredy foy } 5:0
for me Log Barlow

where founde boy & offerd for ympaire of his parsoniall
possell of Didsbury by the churchwardens and
the inhabitants of th

Opposethay G 3 of August this 1663.
(William Birch) Gardner,
George Fletcher } Gardner,

A man told me he crossed the river on the ice by the help of the ferry ropes on the Christmas Eve of (I think) 1860. The ferry flat-bottomed boat took anything across that was not heavier than a horse and light gig. I have often crossed on horseback.

In the spring and summer of 1863 my health was not good. I went back to farming, painting in water colours, roaming about, &c. Neither of my parents believed in physic, they were more for fresh air and



exercise, not for throwing physic to the poor dogs, for when some was sent to me I told the sender I had carefully buried it in the garden. I was attended professionally by a doctor and consulted a second one, but thank God never called a doctor in again from 1863 to 1914.

There was an old farmer named Daniel Hadkinson who told me many things that happened in Didsbury long before I was born, and when I told him that I attributed much of my good health to having a cold bath every morning, he said "there was nowt in that, for I ne'er washt all o'er sin I were a chilt, over sixty yeer, an' I've had as good 'ealth as thee."

Cleanliness cannot be as good for one as fresh air, for George Boswell, an old bus driver, said he “ne'er had time to wash, but when I iles the axles o' the bus I allus iles my feet wi' th' ile rag, that's aw as I e'er does to 'em.”

At the time of writing this there are four living in our family, seventy years of age on the average, and thankfully we may say there is not an artificial tooth in any of the four. It is another item to show the



healthiness of Didsbury, but none of us were reared with a bottle.

“Better to trust in fields for health unbought
Than fee the doctor for a nauseous draught.
The wise for cure on exercise depend;
God never made His work for men to mend.”

A few years after, my father died, and I had a severe, stern struggle to keep the home together, but in 1870 I blossomed out into being a churchwarden, and thereby might hang many a tale.

If the reader would like to know more about churchwardens (men, not pipes), he may find it in a chapter on them in my book on "Folk-lore and Old Customs." "As consated as a churchwarden" was an old proverb. Please pronounce warden as if it rhymed to farden. Here I must write of what we did in Didsbury only. Our chief glory was to leave the church during the time of service on a Sunday, and armed with the long staves of office visit and inspect all the alehouses. We were even empowered by some old law to arrest anyone who was on the road, but we never tried that on, though it has been done to poor folk in my time and by my father. Sam Hampson told me he remembered my father when he was churchwarden bringing a wretched family who were on the road one cold and wet Sunday morning into the church to wait until the service was over. The children misbehaved themselves, which would be very likely if they were starving and there was one of Kidd's long sermons on the torments in store for the damned. They might wonder what could be worse than their present woe.

When Hampson told me this tale he went on to say that father was the handsomest man he had ever seen in Didsbury Church, and then spoilt the compliment by adding, "There's none of his childer as favvers him."

In olden times everyone who could leave home ought to be at church on Sunday mornings. It was a misdemeanour not to attend church service, but nowadays it is doubtful if more than one man in a hundred attends, that is if we do not count the church officials.

The duties we were expected to do are now done by committees of the City Council and their servants. We were the Education, the Pension, the Sanitary, the Watch and Highways Committees all rolled into one. We might pretend to be very important, but money was lacking, for church rates and "vestry cess" were

abolished and our powers resembled those described by Mr. Dogberry in Shakspere, of which I give a shortened version—

" You are to comprehend all vagrom men: you are to bid any man stand.

How if he will not stand?

Let him go, and thank God you are rid of a knave. You are to call at all the alehouses and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.

How if they will not?

Why, then let them alone till they are sober. If you meet a thief, you may suspect him by virtue of your office, but the less you meddle with him, the more for your honesty.

If we know him to be a thief shall we not lay hands on him?

Truly, by your office you may, but they that touch pitch will be defiled. The most peaceful way for you, is to let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company."

The great festival of the once extensive parish of Didsbury was the procession of the rush cart on the fifth of August and the Wakes on the Sunday and other days following. It was essentially a church festival, and the churchwardens were, or ought to be, like glorified masters of ceremony, pompous and powerful. It might be hard to be dignified if called upon to decide whether it were a decent exhibition for a man with a long neck to make money by drinking a pint of buttermilk and then to swallow potatoes so that the audience could hear the potatoes go splash into the buttermilk, and contribute pennies. There were many curious amusements for the people, and the fun of the fair often got fast and furious with fighting and courting for nice old-fashioned joys that prudent churchwardens would not meddle with or they might get into trouble. Their authority was greater with the children who ought to go to school, or with the poor, tottering, old folks who had doles from the charities connected with the church. In olden times instead of a collection every Sunday at the morning service there

was a distribution. About a dozen loaves of bread were given to old folks, who came with snuffy coloured handkerchiefs to receive what was practically a bribe for coming to church. If asked whether they liked the sermon, their answers were very similar to those of the fine ladies of the present day. "Oh yes! it was beautiful." "What was it about?" "Oh! I



THE RUSH CART, 1911

don't know what it was about; but it sounded very beautiful."

Collections in the church were only made on special occasions. I remember one on the evening of Easter Day, 1871, when Bishop Fraser came to preach. I went early to my duty, as a crowd was expected. A stranger followed me and pressed me to sell him a sitting of eggs from my game-fowls. At first I refused, but as he was very persistent I went home with him, gave him the eggs and received five shillings. Then



ST. OSWALD'S DAY, 1882

One of the last times the rush cart was made for the once great festival of Didsbury Wakes. When the above was photographed the Morris dancers were refreshing in the pub round the corner.

I asked the rector if Sunday trading was very wicked, and told him the circumstances. Of course he hum'd and haw'd until I relieved him by asking if it would be all right if I put the five shillings as so much extra into the collection. "Very good, very right, quite the proper thing to do," was the priestly reply. My thoughts shot back to days long past at Cheltenham College, where a youth asked the teacher of our class what was meant by the doctrine of absolution. The pedagogue replied: "If a man steals a leg of mutton and gives half of it to the priest, the priest will give him absolution and it's all right." That man would get half of the leg of mutton in addition to absolution, but all I got was absolution, for the five shillings went to the parson's collection and the other fellow went off with the eggs.

The rector's warden was a Dr. Middleton, a very polite, courtly old gentleman, as beffitted a retired doctor. His wife was from the Jepsons, an old family in the neighbourhood. One evening he asked me to go through the church accounts, and tea was provided. The doctor may have been excited about the accounts and stirred his tea vigorously, whereupon "Susan, love" sternly said, "Tom, I'd have you know that's one of my best silver spoons": and Tom dropped the spoon as if it had scalded him, and meekly ceased to wear out Susan's best silver.

Daniel Hadkinson, the farmer, was sidesman, and when strutting majestically about with our silver-topped staves on Sunday mornings he would use his staff as if it were a pikel tedding hay when he saw anything lying in the road. He said when his father was church-warden all the wardens had a five-shilling dinner four times a year, paid for out of the public money, and other church officials had some according to rank. We were better than that, and also took better care of papers and documents connected with the church, for



BARLOW MOOR, DIDSBUY, 1870

The Wellington Hotel stands on the site of the Grey Horse Inn on the left, having "Bowling-green" on its gable. The library is built on its bowling-green. The station is on the site of the cottages opposite. None of the houses remain. There are now five railway stations, or parts of stations, in the old township of Didsbury.

I have some now that were being used by a grocer for wrapping up butter and bacon.

Didsbury Wakes have died out in the last thirty years. There is a Bank Holiday now on the first Monday in August, which must be near to the fifth of August, and then is held the Horse and Horticulture Show, which to some extent takes the place of the Wakes.

It is with some hesitation I mention the Didsbury Cricket Club; but considering the club was in existence about twenty years (from 1858), had a membership in 1868 of more than a hundred members who paid a guinea subscription, and also held "A grand Athletic Festival" for several years, where many events were open to the public, it seems to me it should be recorded, for I was its treasurer and had a good share of the management most of its time. On the ground where we played and ran are now streets of houses. Atwood road goes through the middle of it. Before our time it was called the rabbit-warren.

At the athletic sports of 1868 I first met John Mark, who became Mayor of Manchester. He wrestled in Cumberland style. My best year was 1872, my average score at cricket being 38, mainly from having made 68 not out against Manchester on the Manchester ground. I also won the mile walking race, time 8 minutes 25 seconds, 200 yards hurdle race, time 31 seconds, and putting the shot, particulars inscribed on the silver rim of a horn mug that holds rather more than a quart. Charlie Blacklock vowed he would drain it at one draught if I filled it with Bass's ale, but he didn't, and I didn't let him try again.

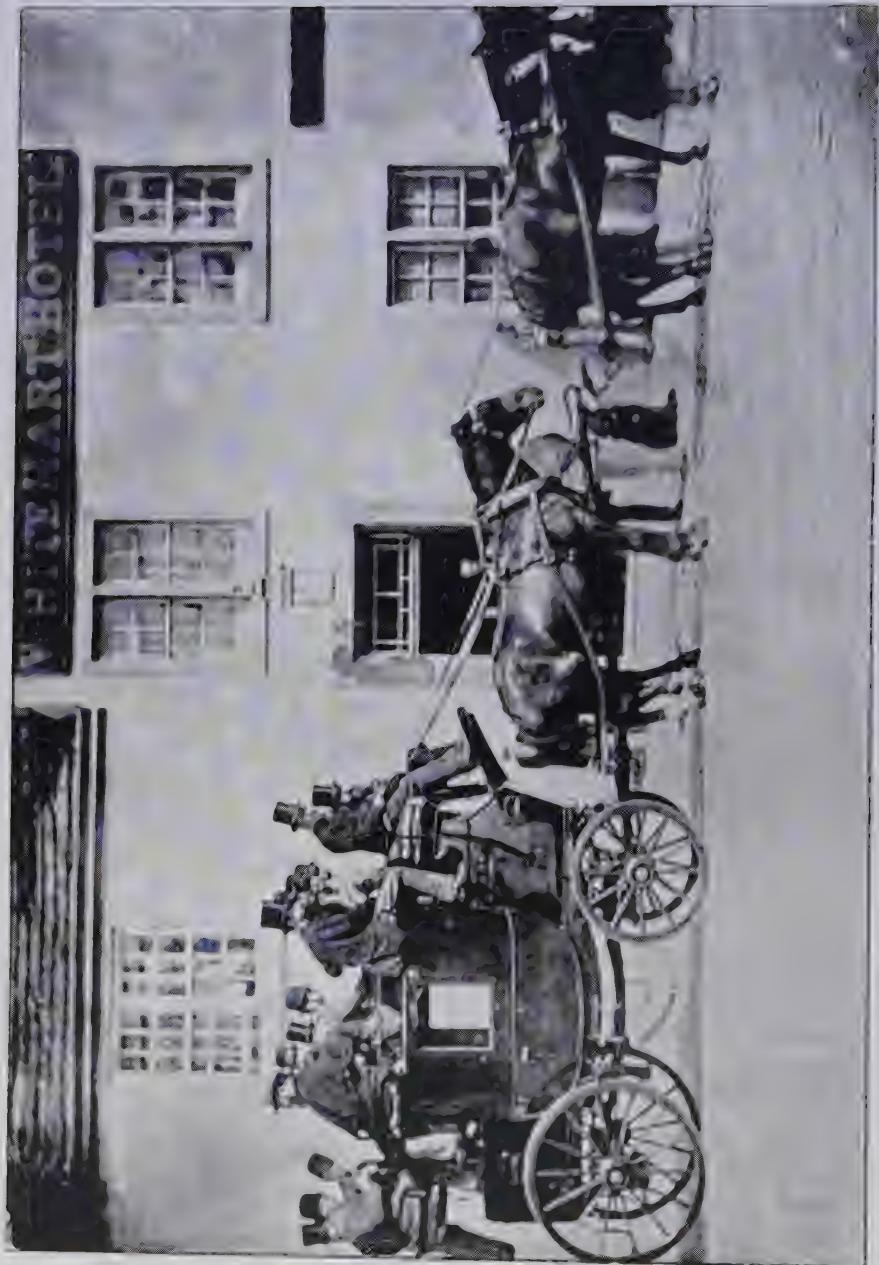
It occurs to me when writing the last paragraph, that the records there given show that in that year I should be at the best of my physical strength, and it may be helpful to young men to know that I was twenty-nine years old, had never been a smoker, had

never been a teetotaller, though always very abstemious from alcohol, and always had about a pint of new milk night and morning.

A venture in the coaching line mildly startled the public. In the summer months of the four years 1876-9 I had a four-horse coach running between Cheadle and Manchester. Its time from Didsbury to the Spread Eagle Hotel in Corporation Street was half an hour, and many friends met on it every day. The subscription for the summer season was £20, for one week £1, odd fares one or two shillings according to distance. The old busses, stopping often and meandering down Mosley Street, took about an hour to get from Didsbury to the bottom of Market Street. In very early days I usually rode on horseback or walked to and from town. A brother and I often walked the five miles to St. Peter's Church in an hour. We have done the journey to Hanging Ditch, nearly six miles, in the hour, thereby going as fast as the bus, but it was exhausting. To walk five miles on the road in the hour with your clothes on "wants doing," as pedestrians say.

When first I went to business in 1860 my father had a well-known trotting horse (there is an account of him in my fifth book), then very old, but he rode to town on him in the morning, my brother or I riding him home at night. My brother once asked our father how it was that when he rode him nearly everyone he met touched their hats to him, but when he walked no one took any notice of him. The father unhesitatingly replied that they touched their hats to the horse, not to him.

1879 was the worst year ever known for the crops in England—the winters had been late and early, the summer constantly wet, the wheat never ripened, and there would have been famine in the land but for the large imports from America. My earliest remembrance



THE CHEADLE, DIDSBURY, AND MANCHESTER COACH, 1876

London, Duke Street, 1876, near the Rev. J. C. Monro, Rectory of Chaddesley. (See the coach in the picture, which has lost its horses, & the post-chaise, the post-chaise, the White Hart, Cheadle, Didsbury, and Manchester Coach, all copied after the original.)

London, Duke Street, 1876, after the Rev. J. C. Monro, Rectory of Chaddesley. (See the coach in the picture, which has lost its horses, & the post-chaise, the post-chaise, the White Hart, Cheadle, Didsbury, and Manchester Coach, all copied after the original.)



THE COACH AT PLAY, 1876

Coachman, the owner; behind him the rector of Cheadle ; the rectory, Cheadle,
in the background.

was hearing of the Irish Famine, 1848, but our old folks in the corn trade and farming said 1879 was worse than any year in the century. 1812 was the dearest, flour and oatmeal being then over one hundred shillings a sack, bread two shillings a loaf. I mention it here, for in that year the persistently cold wet summer and the making of the railway through Didsbury caused me to sell off the coach and most of the horses. The railway station was opened on New Year's Day, 1880.



PARR'S WOOD TOLL-BAR

Its site is now open road. The milestone against the wall is now in the Old Parsonage garden.

The tolls at the toll-bars ceased on the first of November 1881, and with easier access to Didsbury the building of new houses rapidly increased. Nothing has been done in my recollection to improve the narrow steep road from Didsbury to Stockport.

In 1884 I bought this Old Parsonage house where we had then been living about twenty years. Considering all things it was probably the best purchase I ever made; its influence on my life and work has



THE OLD PARSONAGE, DIDSBURY, 1897

Latitude $53^{\circ} 24' 45''$ North. Longitude $2^{\circ} 15' 30''$ West of Greenwich. Floor of house 125 feet above sea-level.

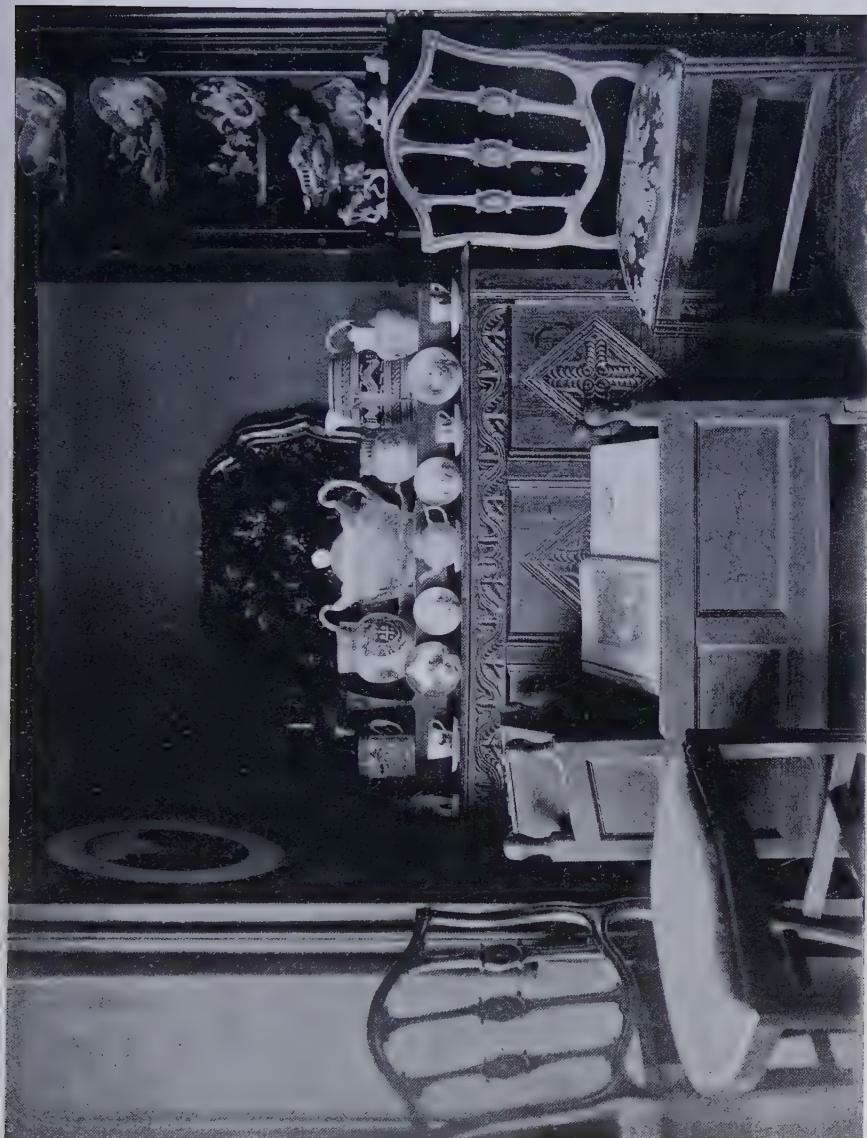
been great, and indirectly on the history of the village. I have lived here fifty years, and being often asked how it is the Old Parsonage has become alienated from the church, here is its condensed record ; if readers wish for more they can find a chapter on the house in my third book of "Pilgrimages," page 360, and about the ghosts in "Folk-lore."

The advowson of the ancient parochial chapelry of Didsbury and this house with the adjoining Cock Inn and the clerk's house were owned by Newall, a grocer, of Newall's Buildings in Market Street (part of the site of the present Royal Exchange), about 1830. His son, Sam Newall, was the curate of Didsbury, waiting for the death of his predecessor, an old man who did nothing but continue to exist. Curate Newall lived in this house, and here his wife died. Scandal arose, very likely it was only gossip, but he left Didsbury, sold the advowson, but did not sell the property. A lawyer bought the advowson and nominated or presented the Rev. W. J. Kidd, who had married his sister, to be the parson. Mr. Kidd had been quarrelling with his parishioners at St. Matthew's and had some hot times in Didsbury, but they do not concern us here, beyond the fact that he lived in this house for about ten years, paying rent to Newall and constantly complaining of the ghosts and other troubles. The house had a shocking reputation for being haunted. No servants would stay in it, but then it was the duty of the parson to lay the ghosts. If a parson cannot make any wandering or perturbed spirit rest, what good is he ? Here, it was the parson who fled, not the ghosts. He got a new rectory built, far away from the church and the restless spirits, and left the Rev. Sam's empty, discredited, haunted house.

Other tenants tried it, and they soon flicted. We came, and here my father died, but we lived on heedless of the ghosts. They were often very disturbing, though

A CORNER OF THE LIBRARY

The chest was made in 1777 by a man named Savage, from oak grown in the Millgate, Bilshbury. The cradle my father and his forbears were rocked in ; the rocker at the foot is nearly worn away. The chairs I gave ten shillings each for in a thatched cottage in Didsbury. Great-grandmother's best teapot. Grandfather's jugs dated with coats of arms. Old Coalport and other china.



we were never like the people of Shakspere's time "distill'd to jelly," or had our "Knotty hairs to stand on end like quilles upon the fretfull porpentine" when the disembodied spirits flitted round. Ours were the harmless, inoffensive ghosts of Longfellow's "Haunted Houses," not the blood-curdlers of other writers, though I had a blood-curdler once; having written of it elsewhere I will here merely refer anyone who wishes to know more to my



THE OLD PARSONAGE, 1867

When we went to the house there was not one plant near to it; the agents objected to any, saying they spoilt the plaster. My mother had roses, honeysuckle, kerria and *Cotoneaster microphylla* planted all along.

book on "Folk-lore," pages 154-161. They will there find that the dogs were more given to staring into vacancy and growling at ghosts than we were, and when some of our furniture was put in the house my mother told the gardener, a big, strong young man named Billy Bonks, to sleep in the house, he flatly refused, saying he would chuck up his place first.

At Newall's death the property had to be sold. We had notice to leave and my mother was very upset about it, for we had become used to the place and were very



THE COCK INN FROM THE ROAD TO THE SOUTH

It was built about 1797 on the site of an older "Cock," timber-framed and thatched, having skittle alley, barn, shippens, orchard, and three other antient small houses all sold under an Act of Parliament obtained in 1786 for the settlement of the Bamford estates.

comfortable. It is a roomy, old-fashioned house with abundance of cupboards and closets. Our sanitary inspectors would say it is not fit to live in ; there are no damp courses or cellars and the rooms are low. I can touch the beams of the ceiling in the room where I now write. Valuers came, the late Colonel Bridgford was one ; they said the property ought to fetch £5000 at auction. I had no spare money whatever, but was anxious to buy the place and offered £4000. It was taken, and I had to set about "pawning my shirt," though that would not fetch much. A good thought came to me : the Cock Inn was let to Deakins, the brewers, for £125 a year. I went to them and offered to let them have it for a ten years' lease at £120 a year, if they would lend me £3000 at 4 per cent. for ten years : then the rent of the house and the interest on the loan would balance one another.

That was agreed to, and the settlement was fixed for my birthday, July 1884 ; but a week or two before the day for completion I was much upset by receiving from Deakins a notice to say that some members of the firm would not agree to the arrangement we had come to. I went to them to remonstrate with them, as I was relying on their finding £3000 to complete my purchase. It was an enormous relief and surprise to me to be told they did not object to that part of the agreement and would carry it out, but as their sub-tenant only paid them £90 a year for the Cock Inn they would not pay me £120.

They had been paying £125, but all I wanted was to get the money lent on mortgage for ten years, and that was safely settled. Afterwards, as I would not accept £90 a year rent, the tenant left the next quarter-day. I put an advertisement in the *Manchester Guardian* on the Saturday, and on the Monday let the place to an innkeeper in the town who wanted a free house for £160 a year. That was before the



THE ROAD TOWARDS THE CITY. FROM THE (ONCE) VILLAGE GREEN, OR DUKE'S HILLOCK

The spire is of the Wesleyan Church.

heavy license duty that has now to be paid, but it showed that the house free was worth £160, though if tied to a brewer it was not worth £90. Since then, having been for several years a member of the Licensing Committee of county magistrates, I have heard many curious cases of "tied" houses.

Well, the mortgage has been paid off long ago. Most of the ghosts have quietly faded away and are at rest. The Cock strives to be worthy of Dr. Johnson's eulogy, "There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is provided, as by a good tavern or inn," and of Shenstone's

" Whoe'er has travell'd life's dull round,
Where'er his stages may have been,
May sigh to think how oft he found
His warmest welcome at an inn."

One little ghost tale that will not make the flesh to creep or the blood to curdle of the most timid may be worth telling again. We were quietly amusing ourselves one evening when there was a knock at the further window of the room, and a voice that sounded more as if it came from a coalpit than a sepulchre said "Mary." I rushed out and into the bushes to collar a very fleshy ghost, the most substantial one I ever tried to lay hold of. It was a big fat Bobby who was courting the cook and had mistaken the kitchen window. They got married, had pledges of love, and lived happily ever after, as the women say.

I have kept a record of the trees and shrubs that I have planted in this Old Parsonage garden and the measurements of the growth of the older ones taken every seven years: it may be of interest to someone in the future. I merely refer to it here, and as an instance say that now as I write in January 1915 there is a single red camellia in flower on the front



YUCCA GLORIOSA

Old Parsonage, Didsbury.

July 1905

of the house, and it has been in flower for some weeks.

The accompanying photograph of a yucca was thought worthy of being taken by the staff of the University Museum. It is the yucca that is said to flower only once in a hundred years, and being boomed in the local papers crowds came to see it, most of them saying they did not know where they should be in another hundred years and I could not tell them. Many better things, as palms, bamboos, camellias, in the open air and lots of mistletoe in the garden they never looked at.

Another matter of public interest that is worth a few lines is the river with its banks. I have often been asked, sometimes by lawyers, and have even been asked to give evidence in Parliament as to when the river banks were made. The answer is they never were made, they growed, like Topsy. Even forty years ago it was a very important question, and there have been lawsuits as to who was liable for their repair. It matters very little now, for so much less water comes down the river.

I have no doubt that some centuries ago the whole of the low land by the Mersey was an estuary, or arm of the sea, that it gradually silted up with the heavy floods from the neighbouring hills. I have known floods deposit an inch of silt all over the land. It was mostly a swamp in my youth, where the snipe and the wild duck bred and traditions were of bittern and salmon. It was generally under water in the winter, and even in the summer I have gone in a boat over the fields to Northen. The land slowly but surely rose, became more productive, more cows were kept, and the owners for their safety spent time and care to keep the banks in order.

Unknown to them, and in fact unnoticed by most people to this day, Manchester began to gather its water from the Woodhead district, to take it in pipes for the use of the city, and when thoroughly

befouled pour it into the river again, but lower down than Didsbury. Therefore all the water that Manchester got from Longdendale was abstracted from Didsbury. As time went on and Manchester wanted more and more water it secured every drop of the river Etherow excepting 95,274,144 gallons of compensation water that had to be given every week to the users lower down the stream: the city using twenty-five million gallons a day. And further, as time went on all the manufacturing towns on the Mersey watershed required more and more water, and all of them made big reservoirs to hold the storm water that all the storms could send, and hold it against a time of drought; and although this was done for their own selfish interests, the bottling up of the floods from the clouds of heaven bursting on the Pennine or the Peak saves Didsbury from many a disastrous flood while its dirtier river becomes less and less.

1885. A few more years and another change of scene brings me to allotment gardens. As what are called the working classes increased in Didsbury, and the garden ground allotted to the newly built houses was less, there was a growing demand for small plots of ground, and Mr. Ashton of Ford Bank kindly allowed a field of his to be cut up into allotments, a small committee, of which his son Mark Ashton was one, paying him the agricultural value for rent and subletting each plot at a profit. We paid him £3 an acre rent, and by subletting plots of two hundred square yards for six shillings somewhere about doubled the rent, but roads or paths had to be made, watering and many other expenses incurred. The project paid its way and satisfied everyone. It lasted from 1885 to 1900. There were forty-eight plots. The land has houses on it now, and all the trustees but myself are long since dead. A. Rowlinson, the postman, was secretary for the later years, and he is still plodding on. This was the parent and pattern of all the allotment

gardens that are now so common in our neighbourhood.

In the more than twenty years that I have now written about there were several cases where roads or footpaths had been closed, or made narrower, or had their names changed, and my natural conservatism rebelled. A crisis came in 1888 when that lively and costly body the Local Board of Health coolly gave away the piece of the old highway beyond the ford of the river going towards Northen. As I constantly used this road when riding on horseback into Cheshire, I was much interested and at once gave them notice I should try to stop their wrongdoing by any means in my power. Their excuse was that the highway and the descents to the ford were repairable by the ratepayers and that no one used them; but they soon found they had not the powers they assumed, and the road is often crowded and much used now. It is the one from the river to the Didsbury Golf Club and the allotment gardens.

About the same time there were attempts made to close the highway from Millgate to the Gatley ford. The road beyond the river had been closed by an Act of Parliament procured by Sir Edward Watkin, who lived near to it. The footpaths along the river bank were also obstructed, but I went every week from Stenner Lane along the banks to the Gatley ford and back by Millgate, breaking through the obstruction and sometimes cutting wire. There was a footpath from Barlow Moor lane through the farmyard of Barlow Hall and on to the river bank, but this was too far off for me to go regularly. One from Didsbury Church across Millgate to Cheadle Bridge was lost in my recollection by having the two houses that now stand on the south-east side of the church built on its site.

There was another contention I had with the Local Board about the sewage from the houses in Kingston Road. They said the sewage went into a sewer they had made in the road and from thence into the main sewer. I said the sewer discharged all its filth into the brook in Millgate and several herds of cows were drinking undiluted sewage. As both parties were stupid in their own opinions I asked Mr. Fuller, the chairman of the Board, what should be done. He told me not to mention to anyone that I had asked him, but to write to the Local Government Board, and ask them to look into the case. I did so, and it was soon found that our newly made sewer emptied itself at the other end, not at the end they said, and as far as fall could be obtained the work had to be done over again and at once.

Another troublesome fad of that builder-ridden Board was to change the names of the lanes. According to their ideas the very word "lane" whenever it occurred should be altered to "road," and that would make the property on it more valuable. Stenner Lane they altered bodily to Spring Bank, and fixed an iron tablet to my garden wall with Spring Bank on it in letters of iron; but it was soon taken down and buried in the kitchen garden.

As I was often getting at loggerheads with the Local Board, its chairman, Mr. Gaddum, several times asked me to join them and come on the Board. The prospect was not very inviting, for he was the only one I knew except Jonathan Street, who did any repairs to buildings that we wanted. When Jonathan had to be elected or re-elected he would canvass my mother for her votes, and tell her, "Yo see, mum, I knows aw about buildin' ouses, an' dreeens, an' petties, so 'ahm just reet for th' job"; but that did not commend itself to me, and I was too busy with my own affairs to go canvassing.

The election of members of the Local Board was a



PATTY AND HER FILLY BLINK BONNY

The mare came from Drogheda. I gave £50 for her in 1877 as a wheeler in the coach, and sold her for £45 eleven years after. Her filly Blink Bonny was by the Duke of Westminster's thoroughbred Golden Cross, and is shown again on several pages. Bonny is buried in the garden, but her long tail with last saddle and bridle, also the spare splinter-bars, pole-chains, four-horse whips, and long brass horn of the coach are kept in the Old Parsonage for keepsakes.



To the left of the church tower is seen the clerk's house ; its site is now part of the Old Parsonage garden.

Two photographs by Willie Gaddum, 1886

curious process. The names of all the candidates in the Withington district were printed on papers that were delivered to every voter in the district. Some voters had many votes according to the property they held. Every £50 of annual rateable value up to £300 entitled one vote both to owner and occupier. Therefore, anyone who owned and lived in a house rated at £300 had twelve votes, being so much better than his poorer neighbours.

The voting papers were delivered three clear days before the day on which they were to be collected; and as the collector would be very busy on that day, in some cases he asked the voter if he or she would kindly fill up the paper, sign it, and leave it at the public-house at the top of the lane (there were several lanes with public-houses at the end of them), where he could collect a lot together, thereby saving himself much trouble. Then, if the publican, or shopkeeper, was interested in the matter, or had some friends who were, they could see how the simpletons who sent their papers voted, and possibly make their own amendments thereto. It was common enough for voters to sign their papers and give them to others (perhaps the rent collector) to fill up, thereby giving great advantage to the owners of the property who also voted as owners. After the election all the voting papers could be inspected by any voter, any time in the next six months: another source of quarrels. If a voter wished to become a member of the Board he could nominate himself a candidate without waiting to be asked.

Such a queer way to vote was likely to produce queer members on the Local Board. The chairman, Mr. Gaddum, was a gentleman highly respected and of great influence, but if he was not there—well, if the reader would like to read of a meeting let him turn to a chapter on “The Local Board of Diddleton,” in my book on “Folk-lore.” The book is in most of our local libraries.

The only good thing I remember the Board doing was to buy the recreation ground at Didsbury, and that was mainly through the influence of Mr. Gaddum. It did produce a characteristic outburst from Jonathan Street, who often told us how much he could overdraw his account at his bankers. "What! spenden money on a pleeground. I ne'er plead when I wur a lad, but I con buy mony on yo up. I con o'erdraw me 'count at me banker's seven hoondert and fifty poonds, an' that's more than mony on yo con. An' I've had a hundert an' fifty men working under me, an' a blood horse. Aye, an' I drives me own carriage, an' that's more than mony on yo can, an' I ne'er plead. Plee—eh? I'd mak em worken."

There certainly would not be much play about driving the old pony phaeton, and as for the blood horse we never saw it. Another member who was manager of a mill said it was easy to manage men, but he had six to seven hundred girls under him, and asked Mr. Street what he would do with them.

I remember a Scotchman who said he wanted to build cheap houses for poor people. He asked why he could not have walls four and a half inches, instead of nine inches, thick; and then the poor folk could have the extra four and a half inches in their rooms, giving them more space and air. Another member who was not a builder sarcastically asked if bricks on end would do for the outside walls.

The first time I was nominated as a candidate for the Local Board was April 1889, at the request of Mr. Gaddum and Mr. William Brockbank. I was not elected. The second time, 1890, lost again. Elected 1891 by a much greater number of votes.

A strong supporter of my election was Mr. William Brockbank, who had been having newspaper-letter warfare about the iniquities of the Local Board and Lord Egerton. He said that as nearly all the members of the Board

were Tories and Lord Egerton was the president of the Tory clubs and associations, they were all afraid to oppose any of the land schemes of his lordship. A Mr. Horkheimer, who had been elected by twenty more votes than I in the previous election, wrote against both of us, and added to his signature that he was a Tory. When I had been on the Board a few months I brought up the matter of the closing of footpaths, and amongst others the ancient path that led from Barlow Moor lane through the farmyard of Barlow Hall and down to the Barlow ford of the river. Members tried to stop me by saying if I talked like that I should offend Lord Egerton; as that did not frighten me, Horkheimer interrupted, saying I had "footpaths on the brain," and the time of the Board should not be wasted by a new member who could not know the ins and outs of the case. I retorted that I had known the footpaths before he had left Jerusalem, or Germany, or wherever he had got out of. This was about the first of the little "rows" that we gradually got accustomed to, and perhaps it was as well that my natural pugnacity had some vent and was enabled to let off steam before I had to deal with larger bodies: for some of the many lessons learnt in public debate are not to take any notice of all the nasty things that may be said to you or about you, and to allow other people to have their opinions.

At the time I write this the Barlow Hall footpath question has never been settled, but the present Lord Egerton is offering to the Manchester Corporation the Barlow Hall estate for £25,000, after trying to get £50,000 for it: and a strip of land that our Local Board allowed him to enclose at the side of Barlow Moor lane has now been bought back by the Tramways Committee for the widening of the road. The old lane had been very wide; gypsies encamped on the wayside. This extra width Lord Egerton enclosed, and one of the first public meetings I ever addressed was against any



1893

of the wayside being enclosed. The matter was "compromised" by each party taking some. I still believe that but for me there would have been no opposition to his lordship annexing the whole.

When in 1894 the Local Board was slowly dying it was ordained that its undivided district should be made into six districts, or wards, as the population had so enormously increased. Didsbury was to have two of these six wards, and great was the contention as to what was to be the name of one of them. We used to call it "th' Moor," but genteel villas were springing up as mushrooms, toadstools, or Jonah's gourd flourish in a night, and the builders knew that a name savouring of royalty would bring higher rents, so they named it Albert Park. Others voted for West Didsbury and won after an appeal to the County Council. The matter ended in a big lawsuit at the Assize Courts, for Mr. Coombs, who was on the Local Board, sued Mr. Brockbank, who was not on the Board, but who had said and written many things, for damages to his reputation and possibly for damages to his house, the Midland Hotel. I, with many other members of the Board, had to give evidence, and a learned and upright judge with an intelligent jury (I hope that is the proper way to describe them) after a very patient hearing awarded one farthing damages.

Another accusation that is often brought against newly elected members of boards or councils is that as soon as they are elected they get a gas lamp put in the road by their gate. It was so in my case to the extent that a lamp was put near to my gate without my knowledge, and much to my mother's annoyance, who did not like the country lane made towny by an ugly lamp-post. Years afterwards, when I knew better both officials and workmen, I learnt that they did, if they could, put lamps by the

gates of newly elected members. It was done to "colley favour," or to "suck up," as schoolboys say, to their superiors, possibly with an expectation of "gratitude."

1893. Land was bought for a cemetery and a destructor. One of the members who advocated the purchase was so carried away by his feelings and eloquence that his peroration ran: "Do let us have a place where we can bury our friends with pleasure."

Soon after I was on the Board it was reported that two horses were wanted, and Mr. Gaddum, as chairman, said that Mr. Moss had had much experience with horses and provender, and therefore he be requested to buy them. That was moved and carried, and two of the old thickheads at once told me to go to Stockport fair to buy the horses. My reply was that was about the last place in England I should go to for horses. I introduced a man named Wynn from Stratford on Avon and bought from him. One of them, a roan mare, worked seventeen years with us. Then to buy the corn. There were several samples of oats offered for sale, and as is the custom in the corn trade I smelt a handful from every sample as a preliminary judgment. The others shouted and laughed at me, and each one began to tell me how to judge oats, but as I had been buying and selling them, sometimes a ship's cargo at once, one transaction being of more oats than all they had ever bought in their lives, and doing it continuously for thirty years, it was rather amusing.

1893. Several of my friends who were members of the Photographic Society were interested in taking snapshots of animals in motion. I invited the members of the Society to spend an afternoon with me and I would ride about a field while they took shots at me. Very few of the photographs of the horse in motion were satisfactory, only when the distance was great and

consequently the horse very small. Several of the horse and its rider by different amateurs are here reproduced. The horse, or rather mare, is also shown as a filly on pages 42-43 with her dam.

1894. The recreation ground at Didsbury that is referred to above was bought and opened. It is nearly five acres, cost £2500, and the road to it cost £300 to make. For the planting of the borders by the sides of the road I was allowed the munificent sum of £10 (when Manchester acquired it they estimated £50 for bulbs). My mother advised sending to Waterer of Bagshot for a lot of their unnamed seedling rhododendrons and among them to plant sweet briars and sow hollyhock seed. The rhododendrons turned out to be of splendid colour, and for many years all flourished.

About that time we had another little struggle in reference to the building line on the westerly side of Wilmslow Road in Barlow Moor. Wilcock's shop had been rebuilt up to the footpath and other owners wished to do the same with their shops, but a few of us who liked broad roads and footpaths strongly opposed them and won.

The Local Board expired peacefully, "unwept, unhonoured, and unsung," at the end of 1894, and the Urban District Council began business with the new year, January 1895. The voting for councillors was in the manner that is now usual at all elections. There were seven candidates for the Didsbury ward and I got the third place, having another contested election fifteen months after.

Unfortunately for the good of the district, Mr. Gaddum had refused to be nominated for election. Mr. Moore was made chairman and the meetings soon became lively. In a few months they were worse. Our council-room was likened to a bear-garden; perhaps a more classical word would be pandemonium.



1893

The trouble began with the misuse of party politics. Mr. Moore was chairman of the Conservatives at Didsbury, a great man with his party and very domineering. But the Conservative publicans soon split with the Conservative builders, and gradually the majority of the council turned against him and authorized an action in the Court of Chancery to restrain his son from building houses under old bye-laws. The old bye-laws allowed houses of a more "jerry" type than did the new bye-laws, and councillors openly accused Moore of signing plans in his son's name for the building of 102 houses under the old bye-laws when he knew the new bye-laws had been framed and would shortly become operative. The latter contention would probably not be mentioned in the Court of Chancery, and Moore junior won the case, but Moore senior was ostracized by his colleagues, and in the next year, 1896, Mr. Coombs of the Midland Hotel was elected chairman.

If a councillor is absent from his duties (without leave) for six months his seat should be vacant. Moore was absent for six months, all but the last meeting, when he quietly came in, sat for a few minutes without any recognition, and silently departed.

The settlement of another squabble led to greater peace. The trustees of the Wilmslow Turnpike Trust had handed over to Mr. Gaddum when he was chairman of the Local Board a sum of 300 odd pounds that they did not know what to do with. Part of the money was spent on public seats, but the greater part was intact. There was also another secret fund arising from interest and the rent of a piano (when the hall was let). The piano had been bought out of the fund. Some of the new council could not resist the spending of this money in whisky and cigars, councillors with officials sitting up late. An ex-member of the Local Board told me he was passing the Town

Hall about midnight and he could hear the revelry of some of his late colleagues. Two or three of us had several rows about this illegal dissipation when we learnt what was going on, but we could prevail nothing. Then I brought it up at a council meeting when reporters were present. Most of the papers ignored my statements *in toto*, but one published a guarded paragraph. A notice to bring the matter up again in public led to a more restricted and proper use of the secret fund.

At the end of 1896 we found that in 1895 £57, 16s. 6d' had been spent on what was euphoniously termed refreshments: whisky and cigars. The teas were paid for out of the rates openly. This would be about £2 a night, and as many members indignantly denied having ever had any, it works out rather heavy for those who had—say, five or six shillings each per night for the few who enjoyed the whisky and cigars.

On the whole there is much less use of public money for "refreshments" than there used to be, and I never object to meals when there is work, or some good purpose to serve. The imagination of some people regarding our refreshments is fine. I was hurrying to the train one day when a postman who met me on the road said he had a letter for me in his bag. He fumbled some time without finding it, but said he was sure there was one, a big one, from the Town Hall with Alderman Moss printed on the envelope. I replied, "Oh, keep it, I don't want it," and went on; but he said, "Oh, we know, we know: cigars at a bob a piece, and champagne a guinea a bottle."

1895. The lease by the Local Board to the Manchester Carriage and Tramways Co. of nearly two miles of single line of tramways for £611 expired in April. There were many negotiations and interviews about the price to be paid for a renewal of the lease, but

the parties could not agree and gradually ceased to be friendly. The council under its chairman was very peremptory and sent the company an ultimatum to expire within seven days. Two days after, all the cars ceased running. The public knew nothing whatever about the matter, but when on the morning of the first of June there were no tramcars and thousands were late for their work, there was a burst of righteous indignation and vows were made to turn out every councillor. It was evident the public sided with the company and would have let them have the lines at their own price. The lives of the councillors soon became a burden to them, and a special meeting had to be summoned at once.

It happened that I had always been a shareholder in the company and knew the directors intimately. They agreed to give about half the advance asked, to leave the matter entirely with me, and to start the cars in the morning if the council accepted their terms. Then came the question, how could I let them know? Mr. Walker suggested that their manager, Mr. Howard, should wait at the Withington Town Hall for the decision. Sir John Harwood vehemently said No: Howard could wait at Mr. Moss's house till he came home, but he would not allow Howard to go to the Withington Town Hall.

We had a stormy meeting of the council with abundance of recriminations, during which I, being a shareholder, did not speak, but it was evident the majority were not going to face their constituents and lose the next election to please the high-handedness of the chairman. When I told them of the company's offer it was scouted, and the squabble continued, the majority insisting on the cars being started at once. Hours of heated discussion about various schemes followed until everyone was tired of it, and when I told them the cars would begin again at six o'clock in the

morning if they took my offer, they jumped at it if I could guarantee it, but threw doubts on its authenticity and the good faith of the company. My reply was, "Leave that to me, but give me your resolution in writing." They could not do anything else, and they were very thankful to get out of a nasty mess. When I walked home it was about half-past nine on a lovely summer night. There was a hansom cab at the gate, and Howard was seated in the garden waiting instructions. He thought we must have talked a lot, as he knew the council meeting was at six, but he also was very glad to have the matter settled and said the men were waiting for his return. The cars began again at six in the morning.

In 1895 and several succeeding years I moved a resolution for the adoption of the Public Libraries Act and was always sat upon by the Conservative majority. Mr. Joe Lunn (Conservative builder) of Withington told us there was a library in Withington, in an upper room somewhere behind the White Lion, and all the folk that ever went into it were a few women a week. What was the good of having another library?

Some years afterwards I wrote to Carnegie on the subject, and though nothing came of my request at the time, it apparently bore fruit in after years, and will be referred to again.

1896. We had another stormy discussion about changing the name of Lapwing Lane to Cavendish Road. Coombs was then the chairman of the council : his hotel was on the lane and no doubt the proposed new name sounded more aristocratic. Again the Conservative majority won. My old-fashioned Toryism was constantly perplexed by the new conservatism, for I could not understand why conservatism should wish to alter a pretty old name.

I distinctly remember that Robert Raby, a good Wesleyan Conservative, said he believed Lapwing

Lane to be the better name, but he voted against it on purpose to be opposite to Mr. Moss.

Again the public were highly indignant, but we had to wait six months, for the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be altered sooner. I then gave notice of rescinding the resolution, and that was carried by seventeen votes to one—the chairman's.

1896, 16th May. A great day for the W.U.D.C. Lord Egerton and his wife, Her Grace the Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos, were to open recreation grounds in the district and afterwards to be “entertained” at the Town Hall, West Didsbury.

The discussions and rivalries as to who were to receive, to perform, and to make speeches were amusing, but when the question was broached as to which of the wives were to sit with Her Grace and attend to her the situation became awkward, for neither of the heads lived with their wives, and I, as deputy chairman, had the third chance.

I never had had a wife, and flatly refused to get one for the day, or to say anything all day, for after all the opposition I had done to so many of Lord Egerton's plans, I could not be a *persona grata* to him and therefore had better keep quiet.

At each of the grounds members made speeches flattering and beslaving Lord Egerton that must have been very irksome to him, but we got through them all at last, and also the dinner. Then, as the guests rose to go, I was surprised at the clerk coming to me to tell me Her Grace would be pleased if I would accompany them as far as Stretford Station, whither they were driving. I did so; we talked of the history of the district more than anything. I never professed to be able to make myself agreeable, but suppose Her Grace might think my company was better than that of a barmaid, and try the lesser of two evils.

Public men who do anything often have fine little insinuations thrown at them. I had been deputed to see Alderman Tunstall, who had some land to sell that we wanted. I think it was near to his new house in Palatine Road. I reported to the council that I had seen him at his house, had a long talk, and the effect of it. Mr. Auctioneer Provis rose and said, "May I ask if the worthy Alderman brought out the whisky and cigars?" I replied that he had. Then ensued a virtuous outburst of indignation against listening to any terms, or any bargain, made over whisky and cigars? Some members were inclined to take my part, saying they did not believe I was ever that drunk that I was not able to look after the bargain, but the indignation of Mr. Provis could not be appeased. At last, someone asked how many cigars and whiskies we had had, and I replied, "None." "Then why did you say you had?" "I never did say so. I said they were brought out, but I had never had either, though I had some grapes."

1898. I was elected chairman of the Urban District Council and tried to get on with the work and also to observe punctuality, though some did say that was "the thief of time." At an early meeting of the council, as soon as there was a quorum we began. The minutes of every committee were proposed, seconded, and adopted with the minimum of discussion, and the business concluded in about twelve minutes.

Then we cheerily went to tea. Presently the three "orators" of the council, Messrs. Raby, Coombs, and Blair, arrived, bubbling over with suppressed oratory and indignation. They had something they wished to say on many things, and it would take time to state their cases fully and properly as cases ought to be stated; but they were too late, their speeches had to be treasured for another day.

After some months of office I startled the council by proposing amalgamation with Manchester, and said I thought we could get a differential rate of half a crown in the pound. No one would second the proposition. Everyone jeered at it, and Mr. Provis (Conservative Wesleyan) asked me if I was taking leave of my senses, and solemnly prophesied to the congregation that if I were not careful I should ere long be confined in a lunatic asylum.

The next year I formally proposed amalgamation with the city and found two supporters.

When chairman of the council and therefore ex officio a magistrate I brought before the county authorities the claims of Didsbury to have a police station in the village. After several interviews with the county authorities a plot of land was purchased and the station built. It bears the arms of the county over the door. Efforts were made for some time to buy the coal wharf of the Bridgewater trustees, so that the police would then be able to see not only Wilmslow Road but straight up Barlow Moor Road. The trustees would not sell at any price.

In the year of my chairmanship there burst the storm that raged around the proposed sale of the Poor's field, a storm that ended in a contested election, the bitterest and most savagely fought election there ever was in Didsbury.

The Poor's field was a field of three acres, situated like the School fields on the Cheshire side of the river as the river now flows, but in the township of Didsbury. It was bought in 1775 for £200, the rental to be given to the poor for ever. Its official name is the Bland and Linney Charity, after the donors, Lady Anne Bland and Thomas Linney. Like most of the charities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was vested in the rector and churchwardens of the parish.

At the merry Christmastide of 1898 I was told the rector and churchwardens had sold this field for £120, and the Charity Commissioners inquired of me, as chairman of the District Council, if that was its value. I wrote indignantly to say that £120 was not its value, and I would give fifty per cent. increase on that price myself, and at once. The Charity Commissioners would not allow the sale until a public inquiry had been held.

I wrote a history of the charity in the *City News* of January 21, 1899. The next week's paper published long letters from the rector and warden full of insinuations, inferences, and statements that had nothing to do with the case. I replied fully the next week, and also said that I had had a lawyer's letter warning me that "Our instructions are to commence proceedings against you, but as we personally are adverse to a clergyman being a litigant we have pressed our clients to take no further notice of these statements provided you discontinue making them." It was another little pleasure to find the man of law restraining the preacher of brotherly love from going to law, for lawyers are not generally supposed to have more of the Christian virtues than parsons.

On Christmas Eve Mrs. Canon Tonge, one of the Birley family, sister to Hugh Birley, M.P., gave to my mother a parcel of documents relating to Didsbury Church that had been rescued from a grocer who was using them to wrap up butter in his shop. She said I was the best person to keep them, and I found they contained a copy of Linney's will and other memoranda relating to the charity. They came in very useful, for the newspaper war went on. Alfred W. Bentham signed his name in the newspaper as "Warden and Treasurer, Bland and Linney and Didsbury Endowed Charities." Mr. Bentham was the rector's churchwarden, and being manager of a branch bank he was considered a clever

financier, though he rather disappointed his friends as he became better known. When asked what he was going to do with the money to be received for the sale of the field, his reply was, "Invest it in Consols." Consols were then $111\frac{1}{2}$; the price of them to-day officially is $66\frac{1}{2}$. Therefore the income from the charity if Consols had been bought would have been about £2, 10s. per annum. As a matter of fact its income now is £12 per annum.

Experience and history have shown that where charities have been represented by real estate—that is, land—they are real and live, but if turned into money they get lost: mixed up with other church charities it may be, and squandered. Didsbury had lost other charities even when invested in land. I am very thankful to have saved this one. I don't know what has become of the old funds for doles of bread to be given out in the church.

The public inquiry by the Charity Commissioner was held in April, and an interesting, lively meeting it was. When the names of those present were officially recorded the Commissioner asked, "Which is Mr. Moss?" and on my rising said, "I am pleased to meet you, sir." There was a Mr. Gilbert Burrows present, who represented the Stockport Corporation. He at once asked for the treasurer, and loudly persisted in asking for Stockport's share of the money, as they had never had one penny—"not one penny for all our poor from this rich parish." He objected to parsons doling out the money, "filtered through the fingers of a parson," as chapel folk ne'er got any (that objection I had often heard in Didsbury), and demanded that Stockport should be represented by a trustee. Stockport was entitled to a share in the charity, for half of it was for the parish (not township) of Didsbury, and the old parish included Heaton Norris, which had become a part of Stockport in 1835.

It took some time to quieten Mr. Councillor Burrows, and when fairly quiet he came to sit next me, and every now and then nudged me with his elbow, saying, "Bad lot them parsons."

They certainly do

"Compound for sins they are inclined to
By damning those they have no mind to."

I objected to the sale of the field at any price, and said that the District Council would willingly rent it to be used as allotment gardens. Mr. Crofton, the solicitor to the council, formally offered to take it on their behalf at a rental of £7. Forty parishioners had offered to take plots of garden ground. Mr. Henry Simon, who had called on me the previous Sunday evening and had a long talk about the matter, offered to pay for an iron footbridge over the river if the scheme could be settled. He remembered fording the river in a cab thirty-six years before. I have a letter from him dated January 22, 1899, offering a "positive engagement" to give the field to Didsbury if I approved. I got him to give the bridge instead, and it cost him a lot more than the field would have cost, for I felt sure the sale of the field would not be allowed.

The Charity Commissioners settled the scheme by putting it in the hands of seven trustees, the rector of Didsbury, *ex officio*, being one of them; but as this rector has never attended one meeting, the others do as well as they can without him, and distribute the proceeds of the charity to the poor of all religions as well as they can.

It took over two years' income of the charity to pay off the law bill of the rector's lawyer, and afterwards I had to get counsel's opinion and see Mr. Cripps, K.C., M.P., as to the interpretation of the word "parish," where the boundaries of the parish have been altered. His opinion was it meant "the

parish for the time being," *i.e.* the residuary parish. Nothing came out of the charity funds for that "counsel's opinion."

The agitation about the Poor's field lasted for months, kept lively by letters in the newspapers. "The Stockport Rag" published some beauties. Mr. Moore, who had been dropped out of the District Council when the Chancery suit was on about his son's houses, saw his opportunity, took a pew in Didsbury Church and wrote a letter to inform the world. It is headed "The Poor's Field, Didsbury, and the Council Election. Didsbury Ward." It begins: "As one who attends Didsbury Church and eligible for office" says what "every sane parishioner" thinks of Mr. Moss, who tries to "scramble over the unsuspecting bodies of the rich and poor to promote his re-election on the 27th of next month. . . . He is anxious for a man of some means to give him a leg over the stile by purchasing the field . . . let us be free from humbug and misrepresentation."

That is a nice little introduction to the candidature of Mr. Moore, who opposed my re-election with all the "envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness" that his church friends could help him with.

He was chairman of the Constitutional Club, a club formed by a secession from the Conservative Club when Mr. Heald, who had mainly built and owned the latter, would not allow it to be kept open late at night, after serious complaints by the police. Though the Constitutional Club was not run for politics altogether, other pleasures being considered, its members loudly supported Mr. Moore's election and worked so hard for him that they boasted of having obtained pledges in his favour from two-thirds of the voters, and therefore they were "absolutely cocksure" of winning.

After a very noisy and abusive day of wrangling and shouting the poll was declared: Moss, 364 votes; Moore, 321 votes.

It was about ten o'clock when I got home. My mother, aged ninety, had gone to bed. When I told her the result she calmly said she had never doubted it : Thank God.

When Lord Macaulay was rejected by his constituents in Edinburgh, in his sleepless night he wrote a beautiful poem that I have often quoted and partly repeated to myself. He supposes the fairy queen of the world of thought and of dream comforts him by dowering him with the blessings that she bestows : that whatever may happen to him he can comfort himself by thinking and dreaming of better things. Not only

“ When in domestic bliss and studious leisure
Thy weeks uncounted come, uncounted fly,”

but

“ When on restless night dawns cheerless morrow.

“ Thine most, when friends turn pale, when traitors fly,
When, hard beset, thy spirit, justly proud,
For truth, peace, freedom, mercy, dares defy
A sullen priesthood and a raving crowd.

“ Amidst the din of all things fell and vile,
Hate’s yell, and envy’s hiss, and folly’s bray,
Remember me : and with an unfeigned smile
See riches, baubles, flatterers, pass away.

“ Yes : they will pass away : nor deem it strange
They come and go, as comes and goes the sea.”

He may have heard hate’s yell coming from a priest in a sermon to the disgust of a congregation. The folly’s bray would be very loud at a hot-pot supper given to the workers on the eve of fancied victory, and a raving crowd is very common at contested elections.

As well as I could I sent to every voter who I thought had voted for me a picture of the church tower and part of the garden of the Old Parsonage. On the back of the large card there was printed : “ This card

is sent with thanks to all those who voted for Fletcher Moss at the hotly contested election of a district councillor for Didsbury, 27th March 1899: when all the leading men of very varied views on matters political, religious, or social, the men who had done the most good for their fellow-men, again united to support Fletcher Moss and the time-honoured maxim . . . Honesty is the best policy."



THE PRAYERS OF THE CONGREGATION ARE DESIRED FOR—THIS

It seems rather flamboyant now, but the abuse that had been thrown at me for weeks was very thick. Some of the names of my nominators and supporters still on the cards are: G. H. Gaddum, J.P., Dr. Rhodes, James Watts, W. N. Heald, J.P., T. G. Ashton, M.P., Mrs. Ashton (Ford Bank), J. C. Chorlton, Sir John Mark, H. T. Crofton, F. Sowler, Henry Simon, W. A. Lynde, C. Hopkinson, Rev. M. Randles, Rev. R. Green, Rev. W. F. Slater, A. G. Roby, Dr. Collins,



A DESIGN IN COLOUR FOR A STAINED-Glass WINDOW

Sent from Rushmere Park, Salisbury, by a man I had never seen. He left a space for the adjective before the word parson, and refers to Gawsworth where in my first book of pilgrimages the gate of the rectory is shown with a big notice board on it, "Trespassers will be prosecuted," as if his reverence the rector fervently prayed in church and publicly notified the opposite in practice just outside the church.

James Heald, and many others well known in Didsbury to-day. In old-fashioned phrase Amos Mason said "all the gentry" were for me.

All the expenses were paid as fast as they were incurred by someone unknown to me. It was quite a surprise, for at every other contested election I paid all my own expenses.

The old gibe about "Beer and Bible," meaning publican and parson, working together on the wrong side at contested elections seemed quite applicable here: but instead of a publican there was a club, worse than any beerhouse in my opinion, for public-houses have to close some time at night and gambling is not allowed. A young man well known to me who committed suicide, leaving a wife and family, was several times brought from this club "next day."

It was called the Constitutional Club. Mr. Moore was its chairman, and it was said that a churchwarden sometimes served the drinks, thereby bestowing on them some slight blessing and sanctification. On the night of the election the language was lurid; "traitors" were hoarsely denounced; someone burst a blood-vessel and everyone thought it better to go home and keep quiet.

Perhaps the best of the benefits that come from public life are the many friendships that are made; but

"He makes no friends who never made a foe."

Some of my foes soon came to an untimely end, either by death, or in shame that should be worse than death. The club became desolate and sold up—the gang was broken up. If we try to bury the hatchet let the epitaph be short and sweet, as in the worldly wisdom of the old churchyard—

"My wife's dead. Here let her lie.
She's at rest: and so am I."

Or the lesson, in stately, well-known language—

“Corruption wins not more than honesty.
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
To silence envious tongues: be just, and fear not.
Let all the ends thou aim’st at be thy country’s,
Thy God’s, and truth’s: then, if thou fall’st—

There, take an inventory of all I have.

Some important things happened to Didsbury through that bitterly fought election in 1899. I will take the buying of the Conservative Club and the turning it into a Liberal Club for the first. The Conservative Club had been badly managed and most of its respectable members had left before the disreputables had been turned out and had formed the Constitutional Club. The Liberals had only an uncomfortable upstairs room for their meetings, but they had a chief in John Watt, who was an indefatigable worker, who more than any other man helped to win the election for me, and who has always proved himself to be a most sincere friend. He told me several times how much better he could manage if there was a good place for Liberals of all classes to meet, a clubhouse that could be respectably conducted. I told him to buy the Conservative Club, for as chairman of the Technical Instruction Committee I had tried to buy it for the council as a technical school, but the council had not gone on with the scheme: if he could raise £1000 to pay off the mortgage on the club premises his way was plain.

It was at the railway station one morning I told him, and on arrival at Manchester he asked me to go with him to a lawyer’s and give all particulars about the club. I said, “Where is the £1000 to come from?” His answer was, “I’ll find that.”

The affair was successfully carried out. I had nothing to do with it, or with the club, until years after I got so disgusted with continual mismanagement

of local affairs by the Tories that I had to cast my lot with the party of progress.

Another good thing for Didsbury that grew out of the struggle was the bridge over the Mersey at the ford. Mr. Simon had offered to pay for one if the council would rent the Poor's field and sublet it to working men for allotment gardens. I got everything agreed upon excepting an unsuspected difficulty in buying the bits of land on which the pillars that carried the bridge could stand. There was the old public road up to and beyond the river, but the way through the river went diagonally and the bridge must go straight across. Mr. Sam Yates, to whom the Poor's field had been sold for £120, was the owner of the land on both sides, and he asked £1200 for the bits of land required for the bridge. His price was reduced to £1000, but that was prohibitive. Then came a happy thought to me, a thought derived from my knowledge of the ways of the City Council. The Withington Council had to go to Parliament for parliamentary powers for their tramways, and on my proposal there was a clause inserted in the Bill to acquire the land necessary for the improvement of the road over the river. The usual public meeting of ratepayers to sanction the proposal had to be held in the Withington Town Hall, and though there were many opponents to some of the clauses *re* the trams, the voting in favour of the bridge was about twenty to one.

We got the necessary power and bought the land for £25. The council made the roads and the foundations for the bridge and agreed to keep all in order in perpetuity. The first bridge being put up fell into the river, and I think it was made stronger than originally proposed, costing Mr. Simon or his executors well over £500. The church or churchwarden faction continued their opposition even to writing to the county authorities and to the Mersey and Irwell Board, but polite contempt was all we heard of.

The allotment gardens have flourished and been copied all over the city. They seem to me to fulfil in a small way an ideal socialistic state of things. The rent of the land is spent in charity to the poor of the district. The tiller of the soil has health, recreation, profit, and the purest of all pleasures. Shakspere gave us the ideal state where "Every man shall eat in safety what he plants," and we now plant such fruits and vegetables as Shakspere never saw or ate. Ruskin wrote of the real and wholesome enjoyments possible to man: "To watch the corn grow, and the blossoms set, to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray—these are the things that make man happy. . . . The world has tried fighting, and preaching, and fasting, buying and selling, pomp and parsimony, pride and humiliation,—every possible manner of existence; and all the while as it bought and sold, and fought, and fasted, and wearied itself with policies, and ambitions, and self-denials, God has placed its real happiness in the keeping of the little mosses of the wayside and of the clouds of the firmament. Now and then a wearied king, or a tormented slave, found out where the true kingdoms of the world were . . . a furrow or two of garden ground."

We have no wearied kings or tormented slaves in Didsbury, but we have plenty of wearied workmen and tormented husbands who find quiet solace in growing potatoes and roses, sweet peas and cabbages.

Another small honour that came to me from the notoriety of the Poor's field business was that I was asked to represent the City Council on the Mayes Charity, and shortly afterwards, on the resignation of Sir Wm. Houldsworth, I was elected a trustee in his stead. This charity has grown enormously

and several of the old folk in Didsbury have pensions of five shillings a week from it.

Even the District Council seemed relieved at the result of the election and business went on. There was an amusing difference of opinion about the concreting of the floors of cowhouses. Some new bye-laws were being made and one of the many fads of medical men, who often talk learnedly upon things they know very little about, was that all cowhouses should have cemented floors. Mr. Peter Murray (of the Talbot Hotel) and myself opposed it strongly and divided the council on the question. Everyone voted, sixteen against us two! and the bye-laws were sent to the Local Government Board for confirmation.

We were the only two men on the council who had experience of cows and horses, but experience and knowledge is often ignored in council work. In this case the Local Government Board accepted and agreed to all the bye-laws excepting that one, and that one they rejected. So we chuckled then.

Meanwhile a cowhouse had been rebuilt with a cemented floor, according to the requirements of the council, on my next-door neighbour's place, and within a month a fine, heavy cow slipped on the slippery surface, broke her thigh, and had to be killed.

Once a year the Withington Urban District Council had a holiday, a tour of inspection of the district. They called at the Old Parsonage, where I photographed them, giving them nothing stronger than home-made gooseberry wine. A series of the photographs hangs in the Town Hall, West Didsbury. I reproduce here the one taken in June 1899, that was soon after the election. The two central figures are Sir Bosdin Leech and Sir J. W. Maclure, M.P. The latter was good company. He told us that anyone who had a good conscience could go to sleep anywhere—in church, or even in the House of Commons. He said



THE WITTINGTON COUNCIL AND SOME OTHERS AT THE OLD PARSONAGE, 1899

he was a strong upholder of sound religious education, if it was only to "teach the little beggars their catechism": though the word he used differed slightly from "beggars."

Next but one on the right of Sir J. W.'s massive figure is Dr. Rhodes, and in the row behind to the extreme right is Mr. J. C. Chorlton, and next in order Messrs. Swarbrick, Harwood, Turnbull. The last four are all with us still. Chorlton, apparently a young man, I saw drilling as a special constable recently. On Sir Bosdin's right hand is Mr. Price.

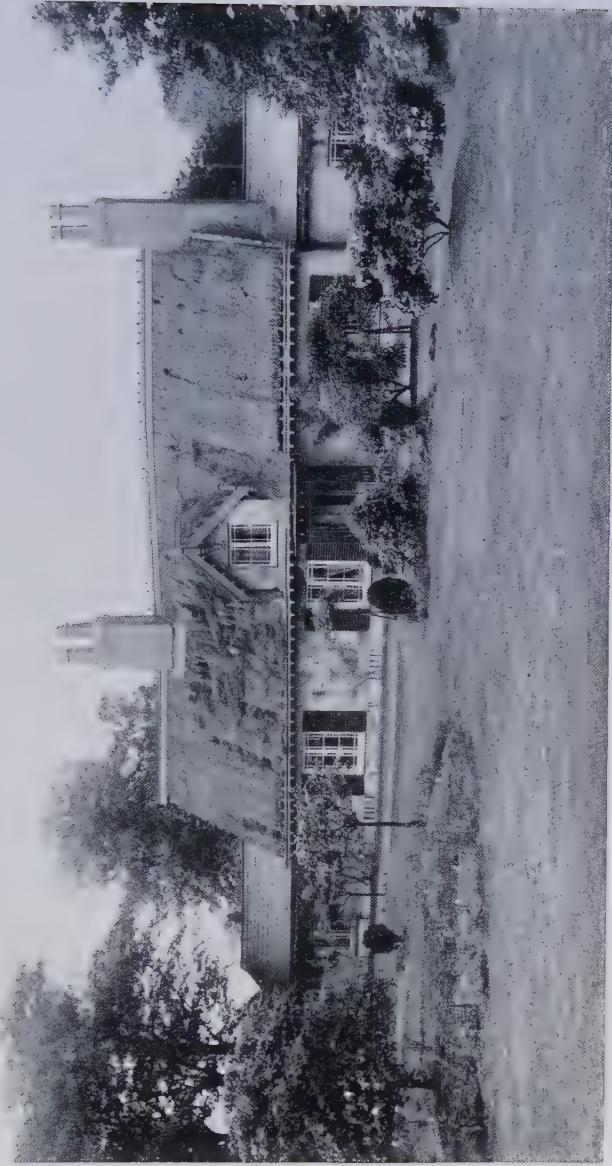
Mr. Price succeeded me as chairman of the Technical Instruction Committee—

"Deep on his front engraven
Deliberation sat, and public care."

As Dr. Johnson said of a man, "I don't wish to be calumnious, but I believe the man to be an attorney." Mr. Price had a fine sonorous voice, with an emphatic manner of speaking, rather fond of quoting legal phrases in Latin. A long, stale, Latin aphorism he treated us to caused me to jump up and protest against him talking Welsh, a language none of us properly understood. The cream of the joke being that despite the stately elocution most of the members of the council were quite ignorant as to whether he was speaking Latin or Welsh.

Lawyers are not always so omniscient as they would have you believe. We had one who made a complaint about a hole standing up two inches in the middle of a road. I had better not mention his name, for he might deny it and claim damages, saying all the road authorities who were his clients had not given him any more practice after they heard of the hole standing up in the road.

For some years our council was much concerned about acquiring a hospital for any infectious diseases



THE COTTAGE AT BAGULEY WHERE THE SANATORIUM NOW IS

that might afflict the district. In 1897 Mr. J. C. Chorlton had told us of a small estate that was on sale at Baguley, and that we bought, and erected a hospital thereon. We gave £5500 for thirty-eight acres of good high land: the year before it had been sold for £4200. The X of my pilgrimages went with me to photograph the beautiful old house that was thereon. The medical officers were sure to condemn it and build the ugliest abortion they could imagine.

1902, 4th October, Lord Derby opened the hospital. The ceremony was rather spoilt by the disgusting adulation and toadyism paid by a few of the performers, especially by one of them, to Lord Derby. His lordship must have been thoroughly disgusted himself, for although petitions were often sent to him praying that some of them, the Conservative members of the council, should be made Justices of the Peace for the county, there never was one of them appointed during nearly ten years' existence of the Withington Urban District Council.

Similar sycophancy was always paid by some of the members to Sir J. W. Maclure, M.P., who was supposed to distribute these rewards to the supporters of his, the only respectable political party. But

“The best-laid schemes o’ mice and men
Gang aft agley.”

In those days the Justices of the Peace for the county were appointed by the Chancellor of the Duchy after nomination by the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, who generally conferred with the chairmen of Quarter Sessions or other Justices who knew the local gentlemen.

1903. In the Whit week of 1903, quite unexpectedly as I returned from a long day's cycling I re-

ceived the following letter from the late Earl of Derby :

HOLWOOD, HAYES, S.O.,
KENT,
June 4, 1903.

MY DEAR SIR,—Would it be agreeable to yourself—as it certainly would be to me—that I should include your name in the list of certain gentlemen whom I am recommending for the appointment as Magistrates of our County?

If so, will you kindly write me a line to “Derby House, St. James’s Square, London”—and also give me any correction of your full names and address, if I have not got them completely stated.—Yours very faithfully,

DERBY.

To FLETCHER MOSS, Esq.,
THE OLD PARSONAGE,
DIDSBURY.

On the 8th of June I received a letter from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster asking me if I would “assure him that I was prepared to devote the time for the proper discharge of the Magisterial duties.” I did assure him, and in a few days afterwards there appeared in the *Gazette* the names of eight gentlemen who were placed on the Commission of the Peace for the County Palatine of Lancaster, mine being one of the eight.

Not being in any trade, business, or profession, but living on my bit of property, I was gazetted under the old-fashioned and proper title of a County Justice: Fletcher Moss, The Old Parsonage, Didsbury, Esquire.

Shakspere makes Alexander Iden tell the King he is “a poor esquire of Kent”; and Shallow said he was “a poor esquire of this county (Gloucester) and one of the King’s Justices of the Peace”: therefore I was entitled henceforth to call myself a poor esquire of this

county, the County Palatine of Lancaster, or “our County” as Lord Derby termed it.

I was sworn in at the Assize Courts, having to take two or three oaths and pay as many guineas. One oath was that I was possessed of landed estate in the county to the clear value of £100 per annum. That oath is not required now. I asked what was meant by “landed estate”—was it to be green fields? The answer was “Yes, with exceptions; for instance, the house you live in, with the curtilage thereto.” I believe they had made inquiries not only about me but also about my “landed estate” before they asked me: though it might have been mortgaged without their knowledge.

It is sometimes said the coveted office of Magistrate is often sold by political parties to those who have helped them by money or service, and bought by big subscriptions to the party funds. Until some years after the date of my appointment I had never subscribed anything to any political party, or been a member of any party. My public work had all been done as a free-lance.

I devoted Fridays to the County Police Court and soon found the duties very interesting, though sometimes painful. When the large districts of Withington, Moss-side, Gorton, and Levenshulme amalgamated with the city, the county business was very much lessened, as the Act of Parliament that sanctioned the amalgamation transferred the police cases to the police courts of the city. But the Act never mentioned anything about the jurisdiction of the county magistrates. Therefore in March 1905 I wrote to the clerk of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster asking if I were entitled to act as a magistrate in the City Court in any case that arose in Didsbury or other part of the newly annexed districts.

He suggested that I should consult the clerk to

the Justices of the Petty Sessional Division of the county. I did consult him (Mr. Rutter) in the presence of Mr. Yates, K.C., our Stipendiary, and showed them a copy of the Act of Parliament *re* the amalgamation. Mr. Rutter declined to express any opinion. Mr. Yates's opinion was favourable to me, but without power. I wrote again to the clerk to the Duchy stating that the clerk to the Justices declined to give any opinion, and all the reply I received was that it would not be proper for him to advise. Therefore I wrote no more, for I had plenty to do, and neighbours were constantly calling on magisterial work: in fact for many years I have done most of the signing and advising that the good folk of Didsbury ask for from a Justice of the Peace.

Some of the cases are very curious and interesting. One of the first I had was from a lady who put a bank-note in the fire and the envelope it came in into her purse, and then wanted the Bank of England to make good her loss.

Another was the case of a man who claimed some money that was left abroad. He had to get a document signed by a Justice of the Peace who knew him to be the man represented. I told him that I did not know him. He replied he had known me for many years. I said that might be; it was very common for men to know me whom I did not know. His reply to that was: "Why, sir, I meets you reg'lar and I allers touches my hat to you every time we meet, and you've returned it." So that settled the matter.

The applications for certificates for exemption from vaccination are by far the most numerous. First babies are the most precious; as the family gets larger, the parents, especially the fathers, are not so anxious, and at times it looks as if the father merely came to obey orders.

Sometimes when I am writing at night I am told there is a lady wants me, but she cannot come in as she has a baby in a perambulator. I go out and tell her the father of the child must apply. I have to be rather curt or we might waste much time. Perhaps the father calls, and when asked what are his reasons for objecting to have the child vaccinated, he answers, "Please, sir, it isn't me, it's her." While writing this a young woman has called, her young husband waiting outside. I brought him in and asked the usual question. He said he did not object to vaccination. "Then what do you come for?" "Oh, that's the mother-in-law." He did not have exemption.

Once a youth came for a certificate, saying his grandfather had been our gardener and so he thought I would be good to him. The grandfather's name was Sam Wilson, and as I remembered Sam's grandfather, Peter Gaskell, the church clerk, the child would be the sixth generation of that family that I had known. Six generations all poor, poor but prolific, a boy father with a baby boy and £1 a week for wife and family.

The most objectionable work of a magistrate is to certify and sign that someone is insane. I have often said to the doctor, "The man is no more mad than I am myself." In two cases the doctor has answered, "If we let him go there may be murder any day, and soon"; and in another, "Try him on electricity."

I asked Mr. Yates what I was to do. He told me that in serious cases I must sign, telling the doctor that I signed on his responsibility.

In the electricity case we went to the man again and had an interesting conversation which the doctor thought must have shown me how hopelessly mad the man was; but I replied, "Most of our Electricity Committee are like that."

It is worse still if a man calls at your house and

asks you to go back with him and certify that his wife is insane. I have refused to be empowered to do that.

Worst of all, as it is a continuous nightmare in the daytime, is to be a Visiting Justice at the prison and go round the cells with a sergeant and two warders asking the wretched prisoners if they have any complaints. Nearly every one complains that he is unjustly imprisoned; but that is not our business, ours is to ask about the treatment in prison. Complaints about bad food or bullying by warders are very rare, but a warder's life seemed to me to be one of the last I could recommend any young man to live. I told my fellow-Justices who elected me to the honourable position of a Visiting Justice that for no money would I continue the office, and I got the new member, Dr. Rhodes, in my place. He liked it: but he didn't live long after.

Imagine having an application at breakfast time from a man who wanted an order on the governor of the prison to allow him some private talk with his brother who was to be hanged on the morrow.

Amalgamation of the urban district with the city of Manchester was every year becoming more desirable. Every year the fast increasing population of the city was spreading over us. Every year we wanted something more, some more arrangements had to be made, with deputations to wait on city committees, and the force of gravitation was taking us to Manchester. If Didsbury had stood alone it might have gone to Stockport, and that would have been a calamity.

When, as chairman of the council, I first proposed amalgamation, the proposal only created laughter and jeers, with a prophecy about asylums. The next year I had two supporters, and very slowly they in-

creased. I could see the advantages to be gained by amalgamation better than the others could see them, simply because I had years of experience in the City Council and saw the difference in the workings of a big concern to one comparatively little. People with short-sighted or narrow views say, "We can look after our own districts better than others can who don't know them." It may be so; but the local jerry-builder, or small property man, will have more of his own way, more influence in the small district, and there will be very little chance of carrying out any large scheme for the good of the community, and therefore for the good of the smaller district ultimately. There is also an advantage in consulting a much better paid higher class of officials in the city.

A very condensed account of my work in the city will explain the matter more clearly. My business life was passed in Hanging Ditch in the corn and provision trade, the old family trade, on the family property. Having become interested in public work in Didsbury I tried it on in the city, and without any committee, or any political help, I canvassed all the voters in Exchange Ward, and wrote an account of that canvas in the *City News*. It is reprinted in my book "Folk-lore, &c.," page 279, the chapter before the one on "The Local Board of Diddleton."

My first contest in Exchange Ward, Manchester, had been in November 1893. I lost by 140 votes. The next year I tried again and lost by 38 votes. At a by-election in 1896 I won by 50; and the next year I won again by 206 votes. In 1900 I was returned unopposed, and in 1903 kicked out altogether; retired from business; the property sold, and demolished.

The chief cause of this defeat was the big arbitration with the City Council that I had had *re* the Spread Eagle Hotel property. The most astounding statements were made about it, often by well-meaning



In 1902 I bought the front door of the Spread Eagle Hotel from the wreckers for £10 to keep it in memoriam at the Old Parsonage. The cost of carting and re-erection was £80.

persons who were utterly ignorant of facts and details. For instance, I was several times advised, or admonished, by "candid friends" to let the corporation have the property for the price it cost me: they said it was the only honest way to do, as I was a member of the City Council; the answer being, it was not all mine, I was a trustee who had to look after others, the property had been family property for seventy years, and had been twice rebuilt: who could say what it had cost? The arbitration was a formal one to settle what the value really was, and the award was many thousands of pounds less than had been *bona-fide* offered for it a year or two before, and with the total loss of the goodwill of the business and of the license and the forced sale of the very expensive furniture and fittings the total loss was fully £20,000.

Another force against me was I had offended the wholesale provision trade. A numerously signed request asking me to represent them in the City Council is now before me. It is signed among others by Pearson & Rutter, Roylance, Dowdall, Hudson, Atcherley and Lunt, Stocks, Clements per Graham, Wilkinson, Chadwick, Dixon, Bowker, R. Fox, Smylie, &c. It is not dated, but I think the date would be 1896.

In 1903 enormous profits were being made in butterine, as margarine was then called, and there was trouble with inspectors. A deputation (not including any of the above names) asked me if I would promise them to get on the Sanitary Committee, whose servants the inspectors were. I flatly refused, and that was not diplomatic but quixotic. Organized and determined opposition began. They said openly they would have someone who would get on the Sanitary Committee, and they did. One of my handbills is here reproduced. It may be funny but is not "business." To the eater of the "butter" it was a joke: to the seller of the "butter" it was no joke.

“BUTTER”

WITH

NO BUTTER IN IT

This weeks newspapers record the fact of a **BUTTER DEALER** being **FINED £20 AND COSTS** in Stockport, where the Borough Analyst's certificate had been contradicted by a certificate from a well-known Manchester Analyst, which said the butter was pure. The Stockport Magistrates had a third sample sent to Somerset House, London, and the certificate from there duly stated that the sample was not butter at all, but wholly margarine.

The Wholesale Butter Dealers of Manchester are avowedly running one of their members for the City Council in opposition to Mr. Moss, who refused to go on the Sanitary Committee (which controls Inspectors of Adulterated Food) to represent their interests.

Whose interests does the Voter at this Election wish to have represented?

The Interests of the Butter Trade, or of

**THE MAN WHO EATS
THE “BUTTER”?**

I had gradually learned and told our local council that Manchester was by far the largest owner of property and the largest ratepayer in Withington district, that its property therein was worth half a million : big items being Alexandra Park and the Southern Cemetery ; that it had millions of pounds invested in profitable businesses paying large contributions to the rates of the city, and millions of assets over liabilities. Withington had nothing, and no prospects of anything but increasing rates. We had lately opposed the London and North-Western Railway Company over an Act of Parliament it had obtained. We had spent £1000 and got nothing. Manchester had spent nothing, but had got all it wanted from the Railway Company.

We paid more for our gas and water than those in the city. We had no fire brigade, were under many disadvantages, and had undoubtedly better join the city and become partners in a powerful company.

Experience shows that the expenses on new property are far more than the rates derived from that property. The expenses on a hundred yards of new streets and houses would be not very much less than on a hundred yards of central Manchester, though the difference in rateable value is enormous. Therefore the rate in Withington was advancing much faster than it was in the city. When I first proposed amalgamation in 1898-9 I said, and had reason for the saying, that we could probably agree on a differential rate of half a crown in the pound. Five years after, we did agree on amalgamation, but the differential rate allowed for ten years was only sixpence.

In 1902 our Withington rate went up one shilling and twopence, nearly as much as the entire rate a few years before—and there was a good prospect of further advance. That converted most of the council to amalgamation, if with it could be obtained Councillor Swarbrick's scheme of a separate committee for the

CIVIC CARICATURES: THE MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL.



From a series in the *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, by permission.

Withington district, with offices and staff for certain parts of the civic work.

On that basis amalgamation with the city was unanimously agreed to ; details discussed, our powers whittled down, all ratified by Act of Parliament, and at midnight on the 8th of November 1904, the once country place of Didsbury, venerable in its long history, became a ward of the city of Manchester.

The agreement between the councils was that the six wards in the Withington district were to become three wards in Manchester ; each of the three being represented by an alderman to be nominated by the Withington Council out of their members, and by three councillors to be elected by the voters in the usual manner.

Alderman is the ancient Anglo-Saxon form of Elderman, one who had been longest known in public work. As I had been living in Didsbury forty years longer than any other member of the council, and for more than thirty years well known in its public work, I naturally expected that I should have been chosen to be the alderman for the Didsbury Ward : but political jerrymandering caused the rejection of both me and Swarbrick, who should have been nominated as alderman for the Withington Ward. Both cases were grossly unjust, but political cabals care for little but their own narrow "scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" principle. Not one of the nominated had ever been elected by the ratepayers of any ward in the city, but only by some of the electors of a piece of a ward. The amalgamation had been mainly brought about by Swarbrick and myself. I had attended more meetings of the Withington Council and its committees than any other member had attended ; I was trustee of the schools and the charities of Didsbury, and its historian who has made its name known all over the world ; and to the present day I

am often interviewed by ratepayers who insist that they come to me because they believe me to be the alderman for the ward.

The rejection of Swarbrick caused the non-success of the Withington Committee, for he was its originator, and the only man who could start it, the only one who understood how its separate jurisdiction or powers were to be worked. Its powers were soon whittled down. At nearly every meeting of the City Council something had to be "referred back" to the Withington Committee. After two years of it the Conservative majority asked me to accept the chairmanship; but I declined. The committee became somewhat of a laughing-stock, the majority of the council and officials good-naturedly saying, "Oh, let them have their ten years."

"A chiel's amang ye takin' notes,
And, faith, he'll prent it!"

It was a very critical, fateful time for me. I had to decide whether to give up the greater part of my public work, or to face another contested election, with almost a certainty of another defeat, for amalgamation with the city was very unpopular, it being the common saying that the independence of the district had been sacrificed to gratify the vanity of a few. It was well known that I had been urging amalgamation for years, had gradually brought it about, had not been elected alderman, and had also been rejected in Manchester. My best friends all said that I had no chance of being elected again. Swarbrick being hurt at the treatment he had received declined to stand, but

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
That dares not put it to the touch
To gain or lose it all."

I determined to trust the good folk of Didsbury among whom my life had been passed, and to offer

myself for re-election though there was no committee or political party to help me.

The evening I wrote my address to the electors is a well-remembered one.

The Christian Science Church in Victoria Park was to be opened, and my sister-in-law, who is very full of Christian Science, had written to me asking to spend the night at the Old Parsonage. At tea time she inquired how I was going on about my re-election. I answered, "Very badly ; little or no chance of being elected." She replied, "Never talk like that. That's not Christian Science. You should be perfectly certain that you would be elected, and then you would be." My remark was, "That's the very way to lose." I was advised, "Try my way ; you'll see."

Two hours afterwards I was at my lonely task when there was a ring at the front door and two young men came in who wished to see me. I did not know them though they knew me. One of them was named Glover. They asked if they could help me about the election, they being willing to work for me. Of course they could be of the greatest use, for they came from the West Didsbury side, where there were many new-comers to whom I was very little known. I gave them a list of the voters and told them to personally canvas as many of the voters as they could. They did so for several evenings and obtained pledges that doubtless were a help.

When my sister-in-law returned I told her what had happened, and received a small dissertation on Christian Science to the effect that you could do anything if you had faith. Faith will remove mountains if you have mountains of it, but even when I was a child I had often been told I was a Thomas a Didymus, and forty years of Hanging Ditch, churchwarden-ship and council work was not likely to have improved me. However, this case seems to have been proved

by the advent of the strangers, or “angels unawares,” when the sister-in-law was at her devotions in the temple of Christian Science.

The address to the electors was rather long, but reading it now, the first time after a lapse of ten years, and after having written so far of this book, I find it mentions many things here written, is a good address, and probably got me many votes. Here follows about half of it :

*First Election of Councillors for the Didsbury Ward
of the City of Manchester.*

THE OLD PARSONAGE, DIDSBURY,
October 1904.

TO THE PEOPLE OF DIDSBURY.

As the township of Didsbury will soon be a part of the City of Manchester I now offer my services as a Representative in the City Council, and at the same time give some account of my public work in the past.

In my early days, Stockport was our market town and court town, but Manchester gradually spread over us. There were no sewers, no playgrounds, no railways, no gas, no “town’s water,” no hospital, no cemetery, the schools were poor, and the roads were bad excepting where there was a toll-bar. Churchwardens strutted about busy over duties from which they are now relieved. It is thirty-four years since, in Easter, 1870, I was first elected “people’s” warden at Didsbury old Church. We then inspected the alehouses and armed with the long Churchwarden’s staves told anyone who was rambling about on the Sabbath that the law said everyone must go to Church or stop at home. We doled out charities, inspected schools and roads, and meddled with many things. The work was more though the collections were fewer.

It has twice been my lot to stop wide encroachments on Barlow Moor Lane. Once before there was a Local Board and once through it. I was elected to the Local Board when that sometimes muddled body changed the name of Stenner Lane, and gave away that part of the lane beyond the river. They had also given away the high-road to the Gatley Ford, and were allowing miles of footpaths by the river to be lost. My first years on the Local Board were spent in constant strife about our roads, and many rights are now secured that otherwise would have been lost.

The sale of the Poor's field, three acres of good land for £120, I also successfully opposed. In consequence of that little agitation the late Mr. Simon offered to give a bridge to get to the field or allotment gardens. The difficulty then was to build the bridge. The owner of the land for the foundations of it wanted £1200. As I was then in the City Council and knew how such little difficulties were sometimes surmounted, I prevailed upon our District Council to get a special clause in an Act of Parliament, and under that clause we bought the land for £25. Who is there now who would wish to be without the bridge, the field for gardens, and the mile of rural lane beyond?

As a trustee of the Didsbury National Schools and a member of the Education Committees of both Manchester and Withington, I have had more of the worries about education than I care for. The whole question is a very vexed and difficult one.

Anyone who has striven through long years of work will know too well of the inevitable follies and mistakes, even the grumbler and slanderers make them for themselves, but on the whole our Local Government improves, and in its future growth will, I hope, still more improve.

FLETCHER MOSS.

An exceedingly good thing at this contest was there was no quarrelling or bitterness about it. The candidates were friendly and abstained from saying nasty things about one another. It was even believed that some of them voted for some of their competitors. "Beer and Bible" were altogether absent; that is, free beer at a club though served by churchwardens joined with rabid teetotal preachers were not wanted by anyone. John Watt volunteered to help me, and me alone; he did the work of ten men, being a host in himself.

It was rumoured there were to be many candidates, but they dwindled down to four. The other three candidates had committees and political associations or clubs to help them with workers and carriages if needed. I was not a member of any club or political organization. Somebody lent me a pony carriage for the afternoon; it fetched one old woman to the polling booth, and then had an accident or was tired.

Everyone thought they knew how the election would go, and many openly said it. It seemed to be the general opinion that I should be hopelessly at the bottom of the poll, for amalgamation was very unpopular, and all the politicians and workers were working for the other candidates. The plumpers' votes showed they were right, but the split votes upset all their calculations.

There were four candidates for three seats. Mayor was the chosen of the Conservatives; Gradisky of the Labour party, who are very numerous in Barlow Moor; Edwards was to be the representative of the newer district of West Didsbury; Moss, a nondescript, to be at the bottom. Any voter might vote for one candidate only, or for two, or for three candidates.

The counting of the votes was in the Town Hall, Manchester, under the supervision of Alderman Vaudrey; it was an interesting business, but it took a long time, and was objected to, all the papers being re-examined and counted over again.

When the plumpers were counted, Mayor, the Conservative, had 197 votes; Gradisky, 163; Edwards, 124; Moss, 109, at the bottom, as prophesied. Then to them were added the voting papers that were marked with two crosses, and then the poll stood: Mayor, 359; Gradisky, 334; Moss, 328; Edwards, 294. The papers with three crosses made the totals look so strange that Edwards strongly objected, and all had to be counted again. He gained two on the recount, and Mayor gained one; I lost four, and Gradisky lost one; four papers were rejected. There was talk of another count, but Mr. Vaudrey declared the poll to be: Moss, 596; Mayor, 595; Edwards, 566; Gradisky, 557.

I had won by the split votes. The three parties had brought their voters to the polling booths, and those voters, whether they were Conservative or Labour, had in so many cases bestowed a vote on poor me.

Was it for auld acquaintance sake? or appreciation? the echo of a tale told thousands of years ago. "I am old and grayheaded: I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Here I am: witness against me: whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe? and I will restore it you"; and they (the people)

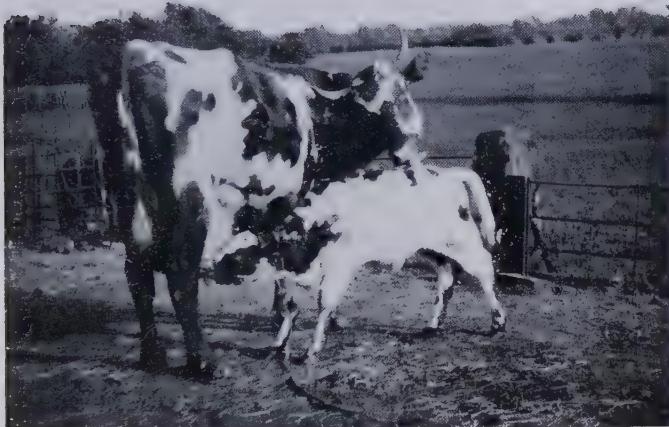


A GAMECOCK OF THE OLD LORD DERBY BREED

said, "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand."

Messrs. Edwards and Gradisky were very dissatisfied with the poll. It may be noticed that the Labour man lost heavily when the treble votes were counted. He contested the seat against Edwards the following year and won by a large majority. In very few years all the three were gone from the council. Fortunately for myself, and for Didsbury, I had just

won "on the post"; for if I had lost, after losing in Manchester, and rejected as alderman, it would have been my "Nunc dimittis," and the ten years that have fled by since then, years in which I have been enabled to do many good things for the public weal of Didsbury, would have been mainly spent in breeding cocks and hens and geese, writing books, making pigs into fat bacon, encouraging cows to give good milk, listening to "the sweet mellifluous milking of the cow,"



BLISS

and generally becoming in my dotage like the famous Squire Shallow who mixed up his magisterial duties by listening to his men-servants' tales of the neighbours, the price of bullocks, blacksmiths' bills, "grafting" apples, short-legged hens, coursing, shooting, old folks dying, and the glorious tales of youth and long ago: though he was "getting pretty bad" to let Falstaff do him out of £1000.

The solace of my age would certainly have been, and may yet be, "res angustae domi."

It was my thirteenth contested election. Surely that must be a record in contested elections. All my life I have kept the fighting game-fowl as my fathers kept them before me. Possibly they have influenced me and shown me the joy of a fight. When Themistocles roused the Athenians for the battle of Salamis, he showed them two cocks fighting in the market place, and told the crowd around him, "These fight not for the gods of their country, nor for the monuments of their ancestors, nor for glory, nor for freedom, nor for their children, but for victory. We who are fighting for our freedom, our homes, our children, and all that we hold dear, can we not do better than they?"

Classic history tells of a crisis in the affairs of Athens when a general had to be chosen to take supreme command of the army in war. As no agreement could be come to as to who was the best man for the crisis the senators were asked to say by votes who were the three best men, and as one name constantly appeared as second or third in their votes he was adjudged to be the best and was chosen as chief.

I had a similar case when offering a copy of one of my books on "Pilgrimages" to the assistant in the reference library who, in the opinion of his fellow assistants, did his work the best. Each assistant told me privately who he thought did the work the best, but they nearly all voted for their particular friends, and the result was many firsts. Therefore I began again, offering two prizes or books and asking each assistant to give me privately three names of best workers. Then, there was no doubt about the result, for one name was second or third in almost every vote, and therefore he was undoubtedly thought to be the best man.

The amalgamation of the district with the city was fixed by the Act to take place at midnight on the 8th of November 1904. I mention this particularly because some time in the night a workman named

Tunnicliff was killed by accident, telegraph wires having fallen on his cart as he was carting something in the night. His body was found the next morning, but no one could tell whether he had been killed before or after midnight, and therefore whether he was a servant of the now defunct Withington Council or of the Corporation of Manchester. He left a wife and family. I went at once to see the Town Clerk about them, a subscription was started, and they were well treated.

Soon after amalgamation I proposed and eventually got passed that the great south road through Didsbury should be widened where it could be widened without great expense. The part from Parr's Wood to Cheadle Bridge was done about 1906. It was a narrow road with crowded traffic at times. Not long after the widening was completed, a lady cyclist was run over and killed by some motorists on the spree.

On the 22nd of January 1908, my old friend G. H. Gaddum suddenly died. He had persuaded me to stand for the Local Board, of which he was chairman, and had always nominated me at my elections. We generally travelled to town in the same carriage and had long rides on horseback together. No man in Didsbury was more respected than he, and he certainly earned my gratitude. It happened that I was chairman of the County Justices when the time came to say publicly a few words as to our loss. Mr. Gordon Hewart, who lived in Didsbury and was in court, added his words.

Another public man who had always helped me in my public life, and was better known to the poor than any of us, died the next year, 1909. Dr. Rhodes had literally spent his life for the poor and needy, and died poor himself with numberless debtors.

In looking over old papers for this book there was one I had completely forgotten though it was dated 1907. It was a private circular signed by Gaddum, Moss, Watt, Norris, asking friends to contribute to a

testimonial to the Doctor. The result of it was that we gave him £318, 17*s.* 6*d.*, knowing that it would be very useful to him and well deserved by him.

I remember proposing his health at some council function and saying that he so loved the poor that he scorned matrimonial bliss, and like the other bachelor benefactors of Manchester was what ladies call an "unappropriated blessing." When asked who the other bachelor benefactors were, I replied: "The giver of the charter to Manchester; the founder of the Grammar School; Humfrey Chetham of Chetham's Hospital; Mayes, of the great charity that now disburses £4000 a year in Manchester; Owens, of Owens College, now grown into the University; the Duke of Bridgewater, the maker of the Bridgewater Canal, who would not have a woman about his place."

Dr. Rhodes was so much appreciated by all his neighbours, and by many who were not neighbours but who well knew his work in the practical administration of the Poor Law, that it was determined to have some public memorial of him, and at the public meeting called to consider the matter I was chosen to be chairman. £368, 10*s.* 4*d.* was raised, and after much debate it was spent on the clock tower that stands in the high road at the entrance to Didsbury Station.

The debates were not only as to the raising of the money, the construction and material of the tower, but where to put it. When we had settled all to our satisfaction, it was found we wished to put it on a cab-stand, and that was under the control of the Watch Committee. Mr. Evans, the builder, came to me saying it was then October, and it would take to Christmas to get leave to build, then the winter would be on, and it would be bad to work in stone; could they get leave to begin at once? He thought I was the only man who might work it. I called on

the Chief Constable at once, saw the chairman of the Watch Committee; the committee met the next day and left the matter with the Chief. As I was going to town about ten o'clock the morning after, I saw men in uniform measuring round about the cab-stand, and going to them I asked if they were measuring for the Rhodes Memorial Clock. The head man replied by saying, "Who are you?" I told him, and added where I thought it should be. The man saluted, said "Right, sir," and opened his book to make a note. What I had mentioned as a suggestion he had taken as an order, and it is always considered a very wrong thing for a member of the council to interfere with its servants; so I felt a bit puzzled, but as my train was entering the station there was no time to say anything, and the cab-stand was removed the next day.

The memorial was unveiled on the 28th January 1911, the Lord Mayor performing the ceremony and several of us making short speeches in the road, from a platform, then adjourning to the Old Parsonage for tea. The company was noteworthy, for besides the Lord Mayor, Town Clerk, and some members of the Corporation, there were Canon Ford of Emmanuel, Barlow Moor; Dr. Moulton of the Wesleyan College; Father Rowntree of St. Cuthbert's, Withington; and another Dr. Rhodes who was nephew of the Dr. Rhodes.

After tea, the Lord Mayor, who was a shareholder in the Trust Co. that were the tenants of the Cock Inn, wished to make a surprise visit, and with ex-Lord Mayor Harrop and myself went into the house to see how the neighbours spent Saturday night.

When I called to the manager, a customer who was having his supper jumped up saying to the Lord Mayor, "Shake hands; thank you, my lord, thank you." "What are you thanking me for? I've

given you nothing," said his lordship, but the man rushed off telling everyone he met that he had shaken hands with the Lord Mayor, and boasted of his glory over his friends. One of them rudely answered, "Thou'rt a liar; th' Lord Mayor's bin and gone hours ago."

Dr. Rhodes had acted as guardian for the poor for Didsbury for many years; at his death the question arose as to his successor. I spoke to Amos Mason about it; nominated him, and he was elected by a large majority.

The short account of Dr. Rhodes, his death, and the memorial to him has taken me past the opening of the temporary library. As the Corporation of Manchester would not fulfil their statutory obligation to build us a library, I did get their consent to open one, and the Libraries' Committee agreed to rent from Mrs. Simon the premises above the Lads' Club for the purpose.

On this occasion also we had tea at the Old Parsonage on a Saturday, the 5th December 1908, only this time we had tea first and a very pleasant meeting afterwards, about two hundred being present, and eleven little speeches in an hour. Being chairman I asked every speaker not to exceed five minutes, and strange to say they complied on the average, though there were two or three orators among them. Here are the names of the speakers: myself as chairman, Mrs. Simon, ex-Lord Mayors Shann and Harrop, Alderman Plummer, Canon Ford, Dr. Rhodes, Councillors H. D. Simpson, A. Porter, J. Swarbrick, Deputy Town Clerk T. Hudson.

The Lads' Club, an excellent institution, was mainly provided and maintained by Mrs. Simon (1905). I had little to do with it, excepting an initial subscription and giving a lecture on Didsbury, until I persuaded the Corporation to take over the library paying £50 rent and spending thereon £500 a year.

1896. 12th February, I became a trustee of the National Schools, Didsbury; schools that have a long and chequered history, condensed as follows.

In 1685, under the will of Sir Edward Mosley of the Hough, about four acres of land on the Cheshire side of the Mersey were conveyed to John Rudd and Thomas Blomiley, *alias* Banks, yeomen, "for the maintenance of a schoolmaster at Didsbury for ever." The schoolmaster was to be appointed by the lord of the manor or his heirs. The lordship of the manor descended to Sir John Bland, and was afterwards claimed by the Feildens, but as the estates were sold in numerous lots and the deeds of the Mosleys are all lost, there has been no lord of the manor for many years.

In 1827 John Rudd, the great-grandson of the above-named John Rudd, conveyed to four trustees all the property of the trust, and new Sunday-schools were built; the schoolhouse being on the waste land of the manor, what is now the end of the Didsbury railway station adjoining School Lane. Another trust-deed was soon made, Robert Feilden being one of the four trustees and renouncing the claim of the lord of the manor to appoint the schoolmaster, and also renouncing a small chief rent of eight shillings payable to the lord. This settlement contains a notable clause, namely, that in the interests of peace, no minister of religion should be one of the trustees—an uncommonly wise agreement, for even lawyers say that parsons are the most quarrelsome clients they have; and if there were not to be parsons there would be less work for lawyers. Probably Feilden had that clause inserted, for he was a barrister by profession, claimed to be heir of the lords of the manor, and had constant quarrels with the parson and some of the flock.

In 1844 the National Society contributed £50 towards the enlargement of the school, thereby giving it an addition to its name, and Government inspection

and control followed. A few years before, the roll had been forty children paying three shillings each per quarter.

In 1868 the land beyond the river, the original endowment of the school, was bought by Sir Edward Watkin, the chairman of the railway company that was making a new line adjoining it, stopping up the old highway from Didsbury to the south through Gatley Ford and also stopping the footpath along the river banks between Sir Edward's house and the river. He paid £115 a statute acre for it (the acreage in the original deed would be Cheshire measure), quite twice the price it is worth now. The area was 7.2.12 acres, and the amount £871, 2s. 6d., which brought £941, 15s. 2d. in Consols. The land had been let some years before for £40, or £5 per statute acre, more than double its value to-day.

In 1878 the Midland Railway Company paid £3500 for the school premises, and also had to pay all the cost of reinvestment and of the order.

1880. £1184 was the sum agreed upon for some land in Barlow Moor where the present school stands, but there seems to have been some dispute about streets, and I can only find £890 as being paid for 2573 square yards of land upon the trusts applicable to the former premises that had been taken by the Midland Railway Company.

1881. The buildings erected on the newly bought land cost £2829, Mr. Gaddum being appointed treasurer and one of the trustees. The little book he gave to me with other papers *re* the school shows that he collected £1000, some big amounts from Unitarians and foreigners who understood from him that the school was undenominational, its official name, and its usual name, being the Didsbury National School.

From 1881 to 1907 Mr. Gaddum constantly worked hard for the school, collecting more than £50 a year

from his friends for expenses, and still advancing more money. The first balance-sheet I have shows that in 1895 the school was £230 in his debt.

As the population increased, the number of children became too large for the school; the religious difficulty became a burning question in politics; amalgamation with the city and more demands from Government increased the worry, and Mr. Gaddum resigned. He did not like the partial change of name and the constant pressure to make the school more of a Church of England school.

In 1909 the Board of Education decreed that the number of children allowed in the school should be reduced from 550 to 340.

Mr. A. G. Roby, one of the trustees, then bought land in front of and behind the school and thereon erected the handsome school for girls and the infants' class-rooms at a cost of £8000, all private money, the old school being also altered at a further cost to Mr. Roby or his relations of another £1000: thereby increasing the total accommodation to 795. This was completed in 1911, and at the end of 1914 the number of children on the books of the school was 664, with an average attendance of 501, and the cost of a year's working £2113, 11s. 8d.

Mr. Roby charges no rent for his school and class-rooms, and that has enabled the Manchester Education Committee to postpone the building of an undenominational school on land they bought in 1906 between Beaver Road and School Lane; a temporary tin tabernacle having to do for the present. Whether this is good for the people or not is a matter of opinion. The rent of a school, as the above figures will show, is only a small fraction of the cost of working a school. The big inscription, "Church of England School for Girls," over the main entrance to the new school, certainly deters many parents from sending their

children there. Roman Catholics cannot be expected to go, and respectable devout Nonconformists have emphatically told me they would never allow their children to attend the school ; therefore, even from the point of view of the Church of England, was not the toleration of the old National School under Mr. Gaddum's government the better government ? The head-master and the head-mistress were "Church," but among both the teachers and the taught there were Roman Catholic, Welsh Baptist, Scotch Presbyterian, &c., who worked well together and had the best "attendances" in the city.

Didsbury is one of the last places where the Church of England is likely to be respected. The first thing to be done to improve it is to get rid of the withering blight of Simony whereby any oddity may be foisted into being the priest of the parish. No other Church in Christendom allows its "livings" to be openly bought and sold ; the seller, the buyer, and the holder or participant in the profits are all *particeps criminis*.

Under the tolerant government of Mr. Gaddum, with Mr. Ball as head-master, the school prospered exceedingly. Mr. Ball had been assistant-master for six years and was then appointed head-master, a position he held for seventeen years, his service extending from 1886 to 1909, and in those years he doubled the average attendance, namely, from 250 to 500. During the five last of those years, the school was in the city and had the best attendances of any school in the city.

"The Didsbury Village School" is the small school in Wilmslow Road, not far from the church. It was built in 1862 at a cost of £600 because the rector "trembled" for the religious education at the National School, where he was not allowed. My father and Mr. Hugh Birley were the churchwardens and helped Mr. Kidd to build the school just to please him. He gave us a lecture on religious education when it was

opened, and told us Didsbury was so called because Didis was the old name of the river and "bury" meant "ford." Neither statement was true. That was the only bit of the "religious education" my perversity remembered. He told us he would sooner die on a dunghill than desert his Church in such a crisis, the crisis being whether to adopt the "popish" fashion of preaching in a surplice or to continue his old "Geneva" black gown. The black gown went the way of the duet between parson and clerk at the psalms.



DIDSURY CHURCH from Carr Brow Wood.

Early in 1909 my solicitor, Mr. Davies Colley of Slater, Heelis & Co., when preparing a new will and settlement of my affairs for me, said that there might be difficulties with the Statute of Mortmain, and as I was proposing that the Corporation of Manchester was to have the main control of a proposed trust, they should obtain parliamentary sanction to the same, which they might easily do when applying for their next Act. I spoke to the Lord Mayor on the subject and he instructed the Town Clerk to draw up a formal agreement with my solicitors.

Shortly, the agreement recited that I should

convey to the Corporation all my property at Didsbury, plan and particulars annexed, but that I should have possession of it for life, and that if a sister and brother should survive me they would have annuities out of it for their lives. After my death there should be built alongside the Old Parsonage "a Home for Poor Gentlefolk of good character"; if desirable, a free library on the site of the Cock Inn; and the fields below the church to be kept as playing-fields, free to the public. The home, or homes, for the poor gentlefolk only to be included if I by will left sufficient funds for their erection, or their erection otherwise provided for: the Corporation to appoint a majority on the committee of management.

This was submitted to the Finance Committee and accepted by them subject to the approval of Parliament on the 20th May 1909. The Town Clerk examined the deeds of the property and found all in order.

Mr. John Swarbrick, A.R.I.B.A., prepared plans and elevation of the proposed Home for Poor Gentlefolk, submitted them to the Bye-law Plans Committee, and they were duly approved by the City Council.

In about a year afterwards I was invited to confer with three chiefs of the Corporation respecting the proposed Trust. One of the three did not come to the meeting, another said very little, and the third was somewhat of an arbitrary gent who would have all his own way, and told me there would be about £1200 death duties to pay on the estate at my death and the Corporation had no power to pay them. Would I provide for them out of my personality? I said my bit of personality was wanted for the building of the Home and other things, and as the whole scheme was a charity the Government would probably forego any death duties, especially if a clause to that effect was asked for in the proposed Act. After arguments I agreed that the Corporation could suspend the coming into operation



THE OLD PARSONAGE

The path to the eagle door.

of the Trust until the revenue of the property had discharged annuities, death duties, outgoings, &c. That meant the squeezing out of me of another £1000 or £2000, and I did not realize it until I saw a nice little estimate the Corporation had printed, with other particulars which showed that if I died within the first year while the annuitants (brother and sister) went on living twelve or fifteen years (why shouldn't we all be treated alike ?), their annuities with £2000 for the death duties on £10,000 (though their valuation of the property was only £7562) would take all the rents for eighteen years before the property was clear.

Very full and misleading particulars were printed ; the accompanying plan here reproduced is from them, the only difference being that a neighbouring plot I should like to buy is hatched in this plan, for if it were acquired, the house taken down, and the garden added to the playing-fields there would be a direct road to them from Wilmslow road past the east end of the church.

These particulars are before me now, and are rather interesting as showing how facts and figures can be perverted.

They had all the property valued by one of their usual valuers, it being well known that these valuations are expected to be at little more than half the real value. One item can be checked by the Government valuation that has since been given on one lot of the property. The Grange estate, now the Fletcher Moss playing-fields, is valued for them by Mr. Robinson at £2038, but the Government, who are always notoriously on the low side, gave it as £2608; not including two cottages and a small plot that were included in the Corporation's valuation. There was also a charge for undeveloped land duty.

The Corporation's valuation of the whole was £7562, which was subject to the payment of annuities and expenses, but they reckoned death duties on

— PLAN OF PROPERTY AT DIDSBURY. —

— MR. FLETCHER MOSS'S PROPOSED CHARITY. —



— SCALE—300 FEET TO AN INCH. —

The whole scheme practically rejected by the Parliamentary Sub-committee, 1st September 1910:
and the rejection confirmed at the next meeting of the City Council.

£10,000 and called them £2000. They also estimated from £4000 to £8000 for laying out bowling-greens, tennis-courts, cricket and football fields, with footpaths, shelters, conveniences, &c.; though anyone would suppose those would have to be paid for whenever and wherever land was bought for the purpose. Why should I be debited with them because I offered the land free?

1st September 1910, resolved by the Parliamentary Sub-committee: "That as the matter does not appear to be sufficiently matured, it be not included amongst the objects of the proposed Bill."

I understood the resolution to mean that "the matter" would not be "sufficiently matured" until my death. Then there would be the death duties to pay. They were the greatest stumbling-block, and I felt sure they were being made much of by some to show the mischief Lloyd George's finance was causing. The net result was the smothering of a scheme whereby the Corporation would in a few years have acquired good property worth £10,000, with more private money to be spent on it, and all for a most desirable charity—or institution, if the word be not liked—a home for many a lonely, worn-out gentleman or gentlewoman.

One of the commonest remarks about the City Council that we hear is, "Why cannot you do as you would in your own business?" Well, we cannot. I have often tried to explain that, but in this case the Corporation of Manchester through its parliamentary sub-committee practically refused £10,000 with more to follow because of death duties they might not have had to pay. It is as if a man to whom someone says, "I will leave you £10,000 in my will," replies, "I won't have it if there are death duties to pay on it." Long ago Talleyrand said, "It is astonishing with how little wisdom the world is governed." I will content myself with saying of the great Elected of the ratepayers, the "Advocatus Diaboli" could scarcely excel them in damning.



GOMER AND JUDY

"There's life in the old dog yet"

22nd June 1911, the day set apart for the festivities to celebrate the coronation of King George the Fifth, was a gloriously fine day, and almost everyone in Didsbury went wild with excitement.

As I wrote a small book as souvenir of the affair, I must write very little about it now. It happened that I had records and bills of the coronation festivities, 19th July 1821, when George the Fourth was crowned, and very interesting was the comparison of the two programs ninety years apart.

The first affair seemed to be entirely dominated by the parson, the churchwardens, and the publicans; they were ignored at the second. The schools of the old church being shut up, 1580 children were stuffed at the other schools of various denominations. In 1821 the festivities were held in the three inns, the Cock, the Ring o' Bells, and the Grey Horse, where everyone, even to "the remaining inhabitants," were to be regaled with provisions and "Strong Ale" at

four guineas the barrel : “ Music, that the Young, the Beautifull, and the Gay may enjoy the festive Dance. *N.B.* Each person will be required to provide Knife, Fork, Plate, and Cup. Respect to the Officers is absolutely necessary. God save the King.”

“ Salt and sourings,” that is salt, vinegar, pickled onions or red cabbage, were provided with the strong ale and the fiddling for the dancing in the warm summer night in the inns in 1821 ; but in 1911 the middle of the day was taken up with gorgeous processions, the afternoon with feasting, the evening with sports and revels in a field until torchlight tattoo ended the long day. The field is at Ford Bank, where a natural amphitheatre of lowland is partly surrounded by high banks, all good turf. I thought the place was so uncommonly good for village sports and festivals that knowing the whole estate had only cost the late Mr. Ashton £15,999, or about £250 an acre, and the high land had increased enormously in value, I ventured to ask if the field could be given to the public, but my application was in vain.

Many of those present in 1911 were the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the revellers of 1821. Let us hope, in the words of the old song :

“The boys have all their father’s sense,
The girls have all their mother’s beauty.”

And that the sense and the beauty may be inherited from generation to generation.

£251 had been raised for the expenses, and an enormous amount of work been freely given by all classes. About a dozen waggons had been highly decorated, and possibly two hundred villagers had fancy costumes. I was asked to be chairman of the meetings and discussions, it being the third time in three years that I was chosen to preside over functions of general interest in the village.

Writing of kings reminds me that I have letters



THE CORONATION FESTIVITIES 1911

Taken from an upper room of the hotel, looking up the road as on page 35

written from Buckingham Palace and from Sandringham, from King Edward the Seventh and from George the Fifth, thanking me for copies of some of my books.

To come nearer home and to more prosaic things. Stenner Lane below my house went "doun th' broo" round a dangerous curve with overhanging trees and a brick wall that bulged outwards. See page 7. For years I had wondered when the wall was to fall and if the road could be widened when it did fall. Heavy wet in September 1912 brought it over, and after a year's constant worrying at our Withington committee I got all well settled by the owner giving the bit of extra width of land, thereby saving him the expense of rebuilding, and we rebuilt the wall (cost about £300) much stronger, with a wider road of better gradient. A great improvement on the old narrow, twisting and steep hillside.

1913. In July was my seventieth birthday. The City Surveyor called one evening to ask if I would help the Corporation by allowing the tipping of earth out of the deep sewer that was then being made through Didsbury on to my low-lying land, so as to widen Millgate Lane. Some years before I had pointed out to him what a great improvement it would make if the old road into Cheshire and the south could be opened out again by a bridge over the Mersey to Gatley. The first difficulty would be the widening of Millgate Lane (or the Millgate as it used to be called) leading to the mill and to Gatley ford. There was now the opportunity to widen the lane over the low ground by the tipping of anything up to 100,000 loads of sand or whatever might come from a sewer forty feet deep and eight feet in diameter.

I reminded him that a few years before I had offered to give all my land to the Corporation under certain conditions, but they seemed to treat the offer with contempt. I could not afford to give the land



THE GRANGE IN THE CENTRE, COTTAGES TO THE RIGHT, OLD FARMSTEAD TO THE LEFT

Now Fletcher Moss Playing-Fields.

unless I were to sell up my home and go to a little house. There were large farm buildings and three houses that would have to be taken down if the lane were to be considerably widened. The Corporation would not be likely to buy them when they had refused them as a gift.

The next morning I went with the City Surveyor to the Lord Mayor, told him the facts, and offered to transfer the Grange estate at once to the Corporation if they paid me a clear £120 per annum as rent for my life, with two small conditions thereto. Lord Mayor Royse accepted most cordially and also publicly to the council. The nasty things that are usually said began to be buzzed about. The grumblers said it was all being done to improve my other property; why could not it be given outright without any conditions, and the cost of bowling-greens, &c., would be enormous. The Deputy Mayor and some others told me they would not accept it with any conditions attached. My remark to that was: ‘Then, like the former offer, you won’t have it.’

Finally, wiser counsels prevailed. Alderman Goldschmidt was appointed to try and settle the matter with me at the City Surveyor’s office, and in five minutes, literally five minutes, all was settled. The Alderman was not so autocratic as the Alderman who rejected the former offer, and we never had the slightest difference. As to the width to be added to the lane, I said at once that was left entirely to the City Surveyor. One minute disposed of the first condition; the rest of the field to be used for cricket, football, other games, and athletic sports, for the free use of the public: the Didsbury Horse and Horticultural Society to hold their annual show on part of the ground. I drew a pencil line across the Surveyor’s plan, giving the western half of the ground for the show in summer and football in the winter. Agreed

to at once. Permission to have the show should be asked every year by someone. By whom? By Mr. Moss. Agreed.

One of the curiosities of the opposition had been the obstinate objections of many members to the holding of a horse, cattle, flower and vegetable show on the ground. One man solemnly assured me he would as soon think of going to a race meeting as to a horse show, and he had never been to one in his life. He evidently believed in the latter part of the old maxim that "the horse is a noble animal but has a most pernicious influence upon anyone who has to do with it." Many asked me if it was likely the Corporation would lay out money on bowling-greens and tennis-courts and then have horses galloping over them. The answer was, "Why does anyone imagine such nonsense?"

After several years' experience of this horse show, I am convinced it is a very good work in the village. In fact it is impossible for thirty to forty men of various creeds and polities to meet one night a week through the summer with a common object in view without it being beneficial to all of them. It is a village parliament with free speech. The shopkeepers vie with one another as to having the best ponies, the dairy farmers show cows of a better class than usual.

The houses are now gone and the lane adjoining the land is widened.

1914. Mayday festivities were held for the first time in glorious weather, and it was reckoned 5000 people were on the ground.

Football is naturally played by ever increasing numbers of youths, but no shelters have as yet been erected. There was an old cowshed with a mud floor that would be very useful if the floor were boarded, but the superintendent of the parks was a Scotchman and said they had no money, but if the

expense was not to exceed £5 and the bill kept back until after March, perhaps it could be done.

I had gone to watch the lads playing football at one of their first matches, and had seen one of them lying on the wet ground crying, and with his teeth chattering. Some boys standing round said it was "only a man wounded," and the players were going on with their game. I saw it was most dangerous for the lad to be lying in pain on wet ground almost naked, but they said they could do nothing, there being no shelter; so I had to act the part of the Good Samaritan, take him, not to the inn, but to my own kitchen, set him before a good fire and give him his tea. He had broken his collar bone and could not use one arm, but the danger from lying on the cold wet grass was worse than from the broken bone.

There are generally fifty or more Didsbury lads playing every Saturday. Clubs from town wish to come, but many cannot when there is no shelter for their clothes, or room to change in. The cowshed above mentioned is always crowded.

After six months' watching the lads playing football, I feel sure there is no better preparation for them than it is for the great game of war. The Duke of Wellington's well-known remark on the playing-fields of Eton was all right for a few sprigs of the wealthy, but in football we may have millions playing, many thousands every Saturday throughout the land good-naturedly straining every nerve and muscle to defend their own and win the enemy's goal, charging into danger, constantly despising pain, and enduring hardships. If a part of their ground is a foot under water after heavy rain, that does not stop them; they splash about and tumble in the water willingly.

To my surprise none of the local clubs play Rugby football. It was the only game I played, but our young men now say it is too rough for them.



LONG-EARED OWLS AT THE OLD PARSONAGE

1913. The "Restoration" of the old churchyard, Didsbury. I had nothing to do with it, but being next door to it, and knowing some of the secrets about it, something should be recorded of it here.

Years ago the large churchyard was a valuable asset to the church, but as time went on it became crowded, and twice it was officially proved there was no room to bury any more bodies, yet the burials went on, the heads of one row and the feet of another being "disposed of" to make room for cross rows, tons of stone and huge railings like prison bars marked appropriated plots, but more room had to be made somewhere and parsons and clerks wanted fees. When it became impossible to squeeze in any more excepting into family vaults the fees did not pay the expense of keeping the churchyard in order and it was allowed to fall into shameful disorder. An

order was issued from Government that burials should be discontinued, and in July 1912 the case was heard in the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Manchester, where all people who wished to preserve their grave-stones were called to appear.

Very few of those interested in the case heard of it until too late, and the poor and needy had little hopes of getting off their work to spend a day in the Consistory Court and survive cross-examination, the consequence being that the law was enforced against them to the uttermost. I had many complaints made to me, but could do nothing to help the unfortunate bereaved ones. High hoardings were put up all round the churchyard and the work went on for about a year. I wrote the following in the *City News*:

The old churchyard of Didsbury has now been "thoroughly restored," and the comments thereon are innumerable. One fact, and one alone is agreed upon by everybody, that the state of the churchyard was a disgrace to all who had the charge of it. It could not be otherwise if those who pocketed the fees for burials spent nothing upon it. Now it is "restored" to something grander than its primeval beauty. Broad walks and stately terraces cover the desecrated graves. The cost, what is the cost? Financially about £3000, but that will come out of the rates. The cost in goodwill, the bitter feelings of outrage in those who had buried parents or children, and placed memorials over their graves, only to find that their poverty, or their ignorance, or their absence, had prevented them from substantiating their rights at the granting of the faculty—that cost will need another generation to efface.

The £3000 on the rates will amount to about a half-penny in the pound and be paid by the ratepayers of



DIDSBURY

Years ago the parish magazine had a very distorted ugly view of the church on its cover. I offered a copy of the above, but was told they were not going to advertise my garden.

South Manchester. All the "Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics," for which the church devoutly prays once a year, will have to contribute. Every little shopkeeper in the sweated slums of Hulme and Gorton will have to pay towards the wealthy church of Didsbury. The humblest, the most poverty-stricken workers, even the despised publican, who in the words of the narrowest clergy dispenses "liquid hellfire," must all pay their share, and the "dirty money," the profit on the "liquid hellfire," will not be refused.

Ratepayers of all denominations are ordered to pay to this wealthy church of Didsbury, a private property church where the advowson, that is, the right to nominate who is to be our spiritual adviser, or successor of the Apostles as some term it, is publicly bought and sold, and where the expenditure of this £3000 out of the rates will increase the value of the advowson and might even tempt an enterprising buyer to make a bid or a speculation on a future "call." "Calls" are not confined to the Stock Exchange; even parsons have them sometimes.

It seems very wonderful that the Local Government Board of our Radical Government should order such a retrogressive order that public funds should be made to pay so lavishly for the improvement of any church, especially of a church where the advowson may be sold on the morrow of the completion of the embellishments. It is not many years since a draper in Manchester publicly advertised for sale the right to appoint the priest who, at the next vacancy, should "cure the souls" in Didsbury; the advantages as set forth in the advertisement were most glaring, but his "alarming sacrifices" had been trumpeted before, and many people, even some of the irreverent, objected to have the "cure of their souls" offered at the same place as baby linen and flannel petticoats. What a help it would have been to the sale if it could have

been stated that an improvement to the church and churchyard, costing £3000, would be paid for out of the rates.

My family lose considerably by the transaction, for in 1856 my father bought a space in the churchyard wherein to make a double vault. I have the receipt for the money paid. It cost about £50, and in the vault there is room for eight or ten more bodies, but the right to bury therein is now confiscated. In my opinion this confiscation is robbery, although the little commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," is read in the church once or twice a month.

Several times this summer strangers have called at my house or stopped me on the high road to ask what they should do about their family graves. Women in mourning with tears in their eyes and angry men who have found the place where their loved ones were buried dug over, the gravestones gone, perhaps the bodies also; for there were ghastly rumours in the village of the many rough new coffins required for bodies, known and unknown, and of steaming quicklime that was to end all trace. I could do nothing but tell them to see the parson. The replies are not fit for publication. At present we may pass them by. Disgust and deep resentment overcome the ordinary conventionalities.

That report was criticized the next week over the signature of "Hygiene," and to him I replied saying that "His letter had so much of the *suppressio veri* and of the *suggestio falsi* that it seems to me to have been inspired by a parson." I maintained that the money had to be provided by the ratepayers of all creeds, that it amounted to about £20 per head of the congregation, not counting officials and children, and was spent on what was virtually private property; and suggested that if "Hygiene" really wished he

could invite some of the 63,000 people from the slums of Hulme who had to find some of the money though they had only half an acre of disused burial ground for open space in all Hulme, and preach to them in the extravagantly "restored" churchyard. "There, with miles and miles of fertile land before him, open country as far as the mountains of Wales or the sea, an appropriate text would be, 'He that hath to him shall be given; and he that hath not from him shall be taken even that which he hath' . . . and it would be more manly of him to sign his name and address."

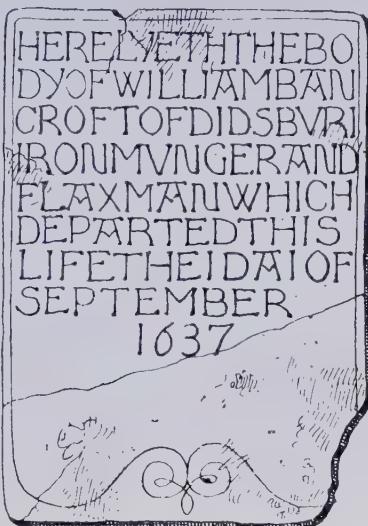
The supercilious vandalism that is destroying cathedrals and libraries in Belgium is on a vaster scale because more powerful than the pettifogging destruction of parish records in Didsbury churchyard, but the callousness to the feelings of others is the same. An historic record graven in stone of all the Woods, a family who were clerks of Didsbury for 250 years, was well worth placing against the outside wall of the church, if it had to be disturbed, instead of being buried out of sight as if parsons and clerks before the present ones were not worthy of remembrance.

Fortunately my small history of Didsbury (1890) has preserved records of some gravestones with drawings of a few. Here are two; the smaller stone has gone, probably a college education would not suffice to read it, though a native boor would know that Lensam was the phonetic spelling of Levenshulme. There was one over a barber that was well sculptured with the tools of his craft: razor, strop, comb, curling irons, &c. Another was over Macnamara, who cleft in twain an officer of the Russian cavalry at Balaklava; and at the furthest side of the churchyard was an immense stone cross to mark where a Slingsby of Catterick Hall was buried. The cross was estimated to weigh more than a ton and was quite plain, but then it might be considered a papistical emblem, and anything that

is "High" is to be abhorred, for the old church prides itself on being "Low."

Perhaps "the most unkindest cut of all" was to dig up poor old Kidd and remove him. He meant well, but was determined to have all his own way like many other parsons, and if he was thwarted would throw himself back on a chair saying, "I'll resign. I'll resign my living. I would rather starve in a cottage on bread and water than desert my church in such a crisis of her fate. I will write to my diocesan. I tremble for my successor." We had heard this so often that we knew it by heart, and he did tremble, or his hands shook regularly, and perhaps "the sunset of life gave him mystical lore" or he foresaw more about his successors than we could. When his first resurrection came it was not trembling the bystanders commented on, it was something else. And though anyone that knew him would regret the circumstance, it is only fair to say that the old Blomiley before mentioned told me that his forbears for centuries had been buried in the corner appropriated

by the Rev. W. J. Kidd for the vault for his family. The saints of old were said to have exhaled sweet savours when they were disinterred, but that is long



ago, in the ages of faith, when their successors felt for others.

One of the best of his sermons that used to come out in its turn and was well known to us was from the text of "Faith, Hope, and Charity." He would begin solemnly and learnedly to tell us that the word Charity if properly translated meant Love, and then suddenly shaking his trembling fist at us shouted, "I don't mean the passion of the sexes." Then, after glaring at us in silence for a few moments, would resume.

After all, I can remember some of the sermons of fifty years ago now, so they must have been better than those that go through your poor head like water through a sieve.

February 1915, another small "restoration" going on at the church, some loads of gravel being carted away, and my man has just brought me a finger bone he picked up in the lane. "Why canner they let things a be?"

With the end of October 1913 came the end of the three years for which Councillor Cook had been re-elected to the City Council, and a very curious state of affairs had arisen, for no one, not even his family or the officials at his business, could tell us where he was, beyond a vague statement that he was thought to be somewhere in the mountains of Mexico, and if he were alive he would come back some day. Mr. Cook was a very excellent member of the City Council; his knowledge of the world, its cities, mechanical and engineering works was wide, his judgment quick and good, and some of us were anxious that he should be re-elected. I had been the chairman of his election committee twice before. At the first meeting he had given a heckler, or questioner, one of the best answers I ever heard. The man asked, "How is it, if you have lived in Didsbury twenty-five years, no one ever heard of you before?" The answer given instantly



THE GATES OF HELL, DIDSBURY

So called because there are two inns on the broadway and many there be which go in thereto: and narrow is the way which leadeth to the church, and few there be that find it. "The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose." The older name for the village green was the Duke's hillock, probably from some forgotten incident in 1745.

was, "Because I always minded my own business and let other folks mind theirs."

We learnt that he was largely interested in a big copper mine in some mountains inland in Mexico; that there was a revolution in the country and travelling was dangerous, rival factions fighting in all directions. In the dilemma Mr. Watt and I nominated him as before and looked after his re-election. On the day of nomination we were told it was quite illegal, he had never been asked about it and therefore he could not have consented. Where was our authority? Watt being very indignant at the opposition had himself nominated at the last hour, though it was much against the wishes of his friends. The opposition realizing that Watt was much better known than Cook, offered not to take advantage of Cook's absence if Watt withdrew. That was agreed to. Cook returned on the eve of the poll, but lost the election by a few votes.

Next year, 1914, the great war had broken out and a rifle club was formed in Didsbury, I being asked to be President. The old Wakes room at the Cock, a room about fifty feet long over the stables and garage, was made into an indoor range, and an outdoor range was secured down Stenner Lane. As President of the club I fired the first shot there, 7th November 1914, quite innocent of the fact that a member was photographing me. I told the Special Constables there assembled that it was more than fifty years since I had fired a rifle shot at a target, and reminded them that Lord Roberts had repeatedly said a good shot was worth six men who did not know how to shoot. I thought, but did not say, that probably every man there, and possibly the fathers of some of them, had been born since I was a Volunteer and a fair shot.



THE FIRST SHOT, EAST DILDSBURY RIFLE CLUB, NOVEMBER 7, 1914

The curious-looking thing on the ground is the platform on which men lie to shoot.

In 1914 a bit of the forgotten history of Didsbury in 1799 that had long been hoarded among family treasures was sent to me as being the historian and antiquary of the village, and is worth recording as a clear, true glimpse into the lives, the efforts, and the trials of the women of Didsbury 116 years ago. One of them I remember; she lived and died in the last house but one of the handloom houses (page 141), and on page 135 is the photograph of the house where another lived and died, taken by her grandson. Hampsons lived in the old house shown on pages 5, 103, 139.

I wrote the following account or summary of the Society for our *City News*:

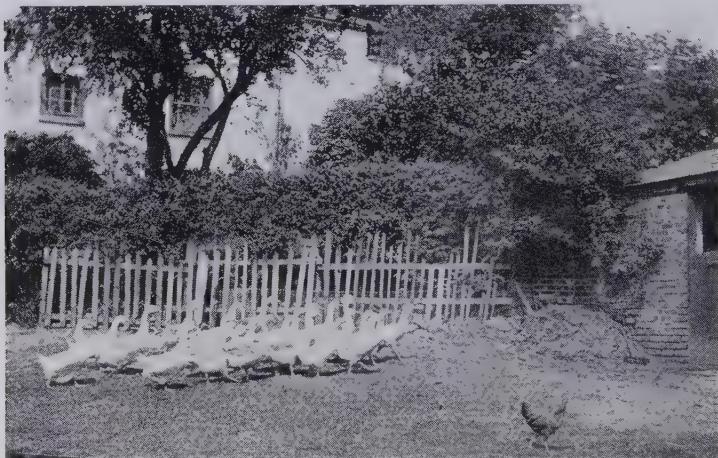
A time-worn little book in pale-grey cover was lately given to me by a man who works in the useful but not exhilarating labour of our cleansing department. It gives the rules, fines, and forfeits of "The Institution of the Female Friendly Society, at the sign of the Ring-o'-Bells, in Didsbury, begun on Monday, September 30th, 1799." On it "Hannah Thomason, 1806," is written in the handwriting of Thomas Wood, who was then clerk of the church, landlord of the Ring-o'-Bells, general factotum of the village, and one of the chief land-grabbers of the village green. His ledgers still show how he trusted his neighbours—the parson, 8d. for a quart of ale and a glass of gin after, when he had gone off without paying; the churchwardens, the attorney, the bellringers, the musicians, the waywardens, the constables, and even the working-men if they left their tools in pawn. He was chosen to be clerk to the society, the other officers being females, and the President was to sit in an elevated chair and fine those who were disobedient to her orders. The wardens were to serve the liquor and not suffer anyone to drink out of her turn. (As if any Friendly Female would drink out of her turn.)

FROM A VERY OLD OIL PAINTING OF THE BELL INN, DIDSBURY.

The Bell inn may have been the predecessor of the Ring o' Bells. The latter became the Church inn, and now the Didsbury Hotel is on its site. Six bells were given to the church by Lady Ann Bland (Moseley) in 1727. In Queen Mary's there were two bells. The distant view is of the low meadows to the south, past the east end of the church.



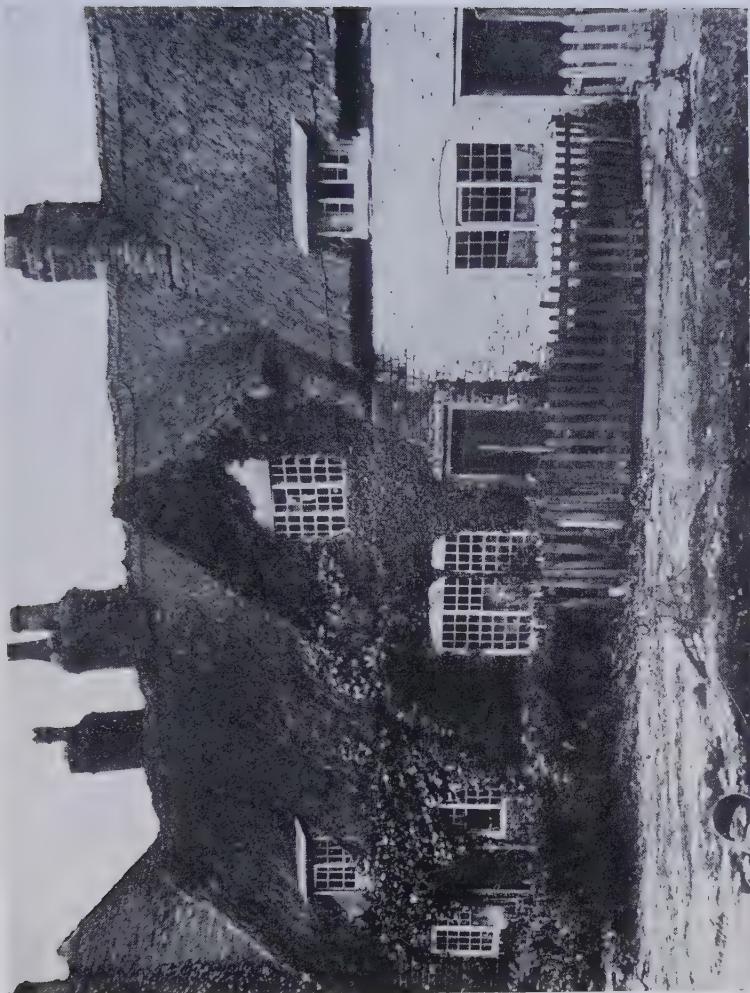
Any healthy woman of good character, sobriety, and industry, between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five years, might be a member. The subscription was “18*d.* a quarter to be paid into the box, and 3*d.* for liquor, each.” Four shillings a week paid to sick members. Funeral allowance £5; but only £2, 10*s.* for a member’s husband, and nothing for a widower. (It looks as if they were driving the poor widower to marry another member.) “Any member bringing a young child on the lap into the room during club



OFF TO THE WEDDING

hours shall pay twopence to the fund and take the child away.” “No liquor to be carried out of the house to or by any member, but all liquor to be drunk in the clubroom.” The fines varied: 5*s.* for fighting; 6*d.* for rehearsing a dispute after it had been settled; 2*d.* for swearing or for entering intoxicated, or being late, or various other sins.

The thirteen founders of the society are named and numbered. Numerous are their offspring, in lineage if not in name, in Didsbury to-day; and the grandmothers of to-day may be pleased to see recorded



COTTAGES, WILMSLOW ROAD

Where the fanciful houses known as Watt's Folly now are.

here the names of their grandmothers who, in Didsbury 116 years ago, struggled in their muddled way to do the best they could to provide for the future and for those they were destined to leave behind them: not to be cumbersome or burdensome to others in life or in death.

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Martha Hibbert. | 8. Mary Ainsworth. |
| 2. Rachael Gaskill. | 9. Betty Watts. |
| 3. Betty Hadkinson. | 10. Mary Blomiley. |
| 4. Mary Richardson. | 11. Deborah Blomiley. |
| 5. Sarah Hadkinson. | 12. Betty Hampson. |
| 6. Betty Blomiley. | 13. Mary Hampson. |
| 7. Mary Hardy. | |

It is wonderful that I should remember any of these women who were middle-aged 116 years ago, but it is a fact. Betty Blomiley lived in the fourth of the five handloom-weavers' houses in Stenner Lane. I remember her sitting on the steps smoking her long clay pipe and children telling her Miss Birley was coming up the lane; then the pipe was put under the brat, while Betty hobbled up the steps to lie on the settle and groan. She was then well over ninety. Peter Gaskill was clerk at the church, living in the house, of which only one room remains, in my garden. He would be about eighty sixty years ago. The Hadkinsons lived down the Millgate. Their breed is probably extinct unless one who went to Utah kept it alive. Betty Watts was the mother of "Sam and Jimmy," who built the big warehouse in Portland Street, where her grandson still rules the roost. The Hampsons lived at Stenner Broo Farm and Bolton-Woodgate; their progeny and that of the Blomileys are numerous. Note how all the Christian names may be called scriptural, considering that Elizabeth was much too long for everyday use.

There remains to notice the man who got the plunder or the most out of the business. A Blomiley,



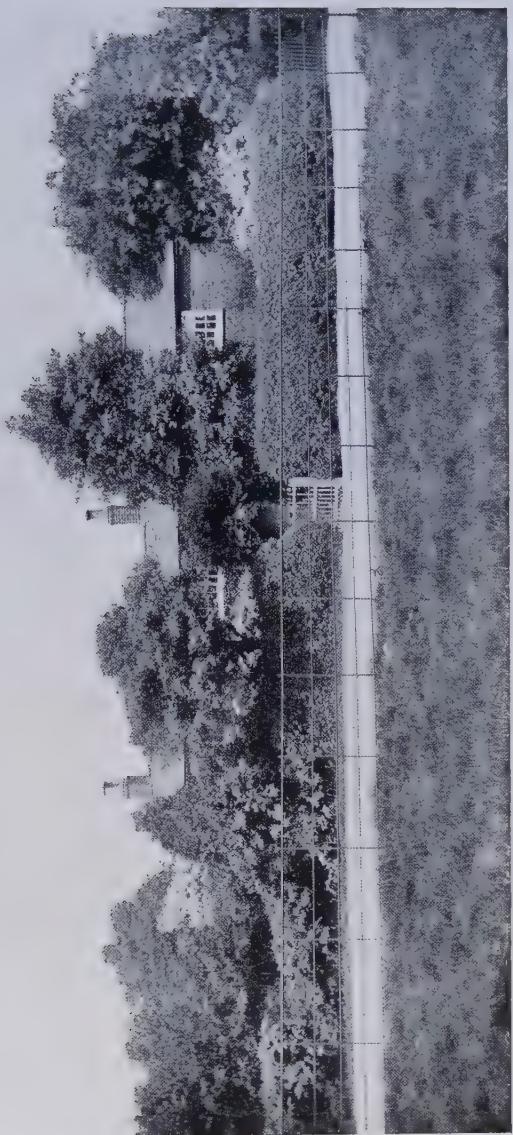
FOG LANE, DIDSBURY

Where the business of S. & J. Waits & Co. began more than a hundred years ago.

who lived to his hundredth year, told me he had often played as a boy on that corner of the village green where Clerk Wood built his house. The house still stands and will have to be bought sooner or later by the city. The wonderful record of the Woods as clerks of the church for 250 years ended with this one, and was fully inscribed on a large gravestone, with poetry describing their many virtues and sufferings. The gravestone is gone, probably buried or broken by the irreverent and heartless vandals who have lately "restored" Didsbury churchyard, at a cost of over £3000 levied on the rates. I like to preserve these records of "the rude forefathers of the hamlet," and note that the average age of all these Woods and their wives was about eighty, though they drank nothing but the water from the Holy Well, excepting a drop or two of their own home-brewed at times.

When I showed the grey little book to Mr. Watts, the well-known partner in my "Pilgrimage" books, he said at once, "This Betty Watts is my grandmother. I'll give you a photograph of her house where she lived at that time and where my father was reared." The John Watts who lived there most or all of his long life, from 1761 to 1852, was son of another John Watts who died in 1801, and grandson of another who died in 1763. Like most of the men of the time in this district, they were small farmers and handloom weavers.

John, the husband of Betty, lived ninety-one years, and Betty's father beat him, for he lived one hundred and one years: but that was long before there was any sanitary authority, or drains, or town's water. It would be difficult for them to live so long now with medical officers and inspectors always on the prowl.

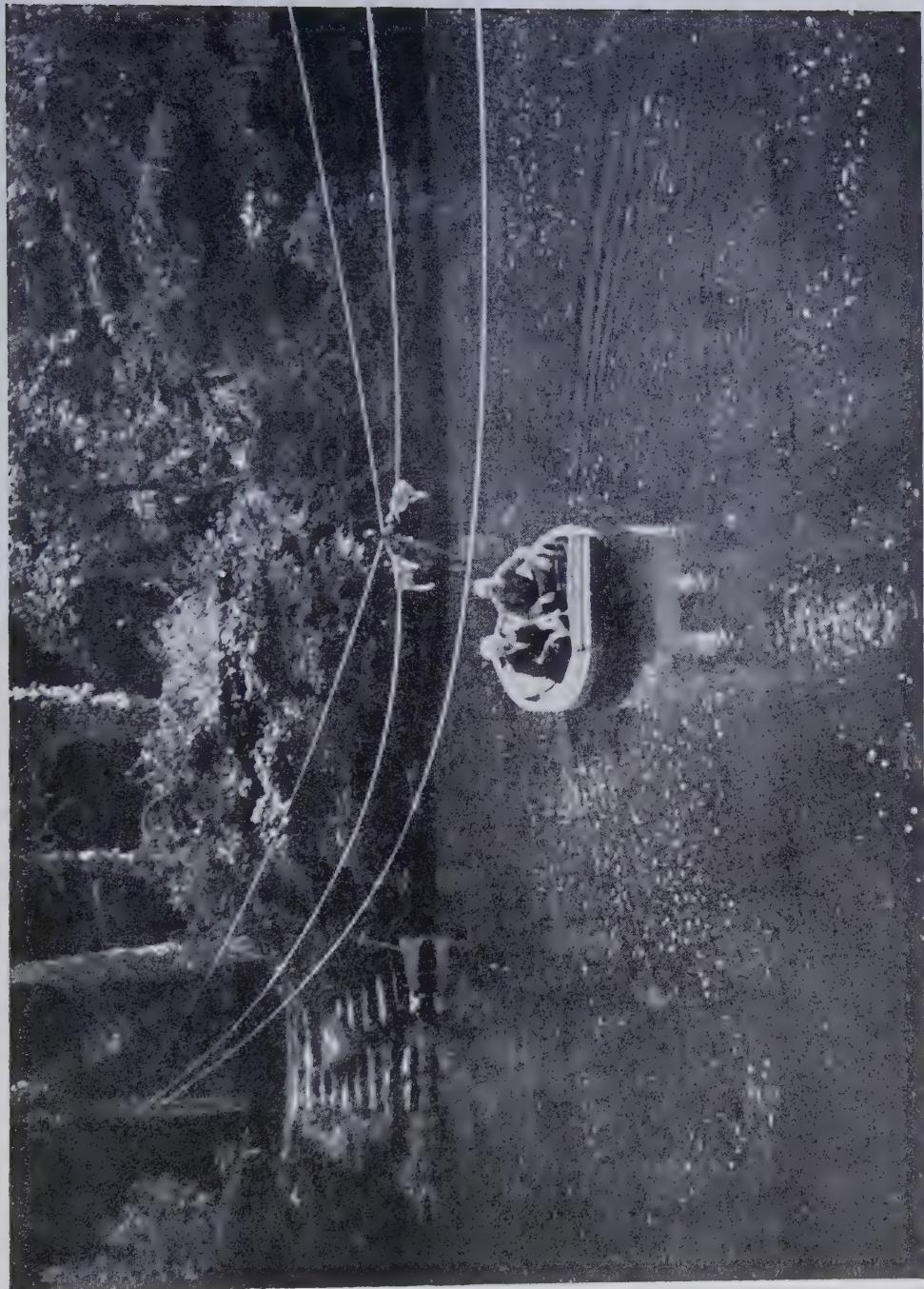


THE OLD HOME OF FIVE GENERATIONS OF THE WATTS FAMILY

Betty seems to have been a remarkable woman. She reared and was beloved by six sons. She was an ardent Methodist who was a supporter of the Female Friendly Society, where the fines and expenses were paid for in liquor; but there is nothing to show she ever drank out of her turn. She invited Methodist preachers to supper, and consequently the boys had sometimes to go to bed almost supperless; so one night when a particularly hungry one was coming, James had his revenge by tying a string across the path that upset the reverend preacher, and Sam got a good thrashing for doing it. The rod or the birch was not spared, but at love-feasts there was currant cake, and there was always handloom weaving to be done.

As the family grew, so did the amount they could manufacture. They prided themselves on the fast-coloured ginghams and regattas they could make in turkey-red or indigo-blue checks for shirtings, aprons, or kerchiefs for the women's heads. An office was opened in Deansgate in 1798; and soon after the fourth John opened a shop, William, Joseph, and Isaac all went to business, leaving Sam and James to mind the farm.

But as time went on it was the two latter who opened the great warehouse in Portland Street in 1858. James was knighted in 1857, the year of the great exhibition, when he entertained Prince Albert and many of the great men of the kingdom, being proud to show the motto on the ceiling of the room where he sat: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings." It was a long climb from the hard work of handloom weaving in his youth, small schooling at Didsbury, opening a shop at Ashton-under-Lyne at the age of eighteen, launching out into the big home trade of Manchester, and on to the mayoralty of the city, knighthood, and High Sheriff of the County. To his honour be it recorded he had never flitted far from the old home. His son James, the present head of the firm of



PILGRIMS ON THE DEE, 1899

S. & J. Watts & Co., was born within a hundred yards of this Old Parsonage, on the 28th June, 1845, in the house now called The Laurels that had been built by his uncle the fourth John Watts.

In 1878 Sir James died, the business having gone down in his old age. After his death the other cousins, partners, virtually turned out James the son ; the business went worse, there was a heavy loss and winding up was imminent when in 1880 James bought out all his cousins but one, though his friends advised him not to handicap himself with a big staff of highly paid men and a great warehouse.

In the four summers of 1876-9 James Watts and I sat together daily on the coach (see page 26), then we saw little of one another until in 1894 I wrote the history of Cheadle where he was Lord of the Manor. He had had a hard struggle to pull the big firm out of the hole into which others had let it slide, but its trade got on a better basis and steadily improved. In 1899 our pilgrimages began in earnest (see preceding page), and for a dozen years were a wonderful source of happiness : and now

When time who steals our years away
Shall steal our pleasures too,
The mem'ry of the past will stay
And half our joys renew.

The reference to the old families and the loom houses where the weavers wove has caused me to rummage among the deeds of the five houses adjoining my garden: and here is another small contribution to the history of Didsbury.

1676. Edward Mosley of the Hough, Withington, Esquire, reserving suit and service due to him as Lord of the Manor, sells two acres of land in Didsbury to Edward Hulme, shoemaker, for £25.

Note the price. Though no particulars are given it certainly refers to land at the top of the Stenner, on part of which the five houses stand.

1755. Thomas Guaskill mortgages two and three-quarter acres of land that was formerly Edward Hulme's for 500 years and for £100 to William Wood, yeoman.

1772. William Wood pays £275 to Thomas Guaskill for the mortgaged premises excepting the house and orchard where Guaskill lives.

1789. Will of T. Guaskill, the actual document to which he made his mark. John Hampson being his



executor, and Abigail the widow of W. Wood a consenting party. John Hampson was his next-door neighbour at Stenner Brow farm, and Betty Hampson of the Friendly Society was his wife, and Mary their daughter, so his great-great-grandson James Hampson, who claims to be the tenth generation of Hampsons in the records of Didsbury, now tells me.

The property devised by Guaskill seems to have been a confused lot of old cottages and small farm buildings. His son Josiah had two dwelling-houses. John had a barn to make into a house, and the shippon with baux over

was also to be made into a house. The will is signed by his mark. The Stenner Broo farmhouse and buildings adjoining, I should think, stood on the land sold by Guaskill to Wood a few years before, being part of the two acres bought from the lord of the manor in 1676. It was mostly timber framed and thatched (see pages 5,103 and 139), as all the houses in Didsbury were until about the end of the eighteenth century, when "Loom" houses were being built of brick and slated, with big rooms for looms.

Guaskill's sons appear to have made a clean sweep of all the old buildings except the barn and baux where the great oak beams still are in the fifth house. Those beams should be worth some money. The row of houses as seen on the next page would be built about 1791, and in 1821 the family wanted to divide, so we have some more intricate deeds of partition between Jonathan Gaskell a weaver, and John Gaskill a carpenter who goes to Castle Donington in Leicestershire. The names of the tenants then were Thos. Barker, Wm. Wood, Wm. Cash, Jas. Blomeley, Sam Taylor. In 1854 the tenants were—in the second house, Wm. Wood, Dan Linney, Betty the widow of Jas. Blomeley, and Wm. Gaskell. I give these particulars because in 1874 Wm. Wood said he had lived in the house over eighty years : Betty Blomeley of the Friendly Society I have referred to, and Mary Gaskell her daughter lived in the fifth house and was supposed to clean the church where old Peter (or was it Sam ?) Gaskell was clerk.

There are other Gaskells mentioned : their pedigrees might be interesting to any of the name. The oldest spelling is Guaskill, then Gaskill, then Gaskell. It is said to be derived from goose-gill, a gill or dell for geese : but I should think more likely from Gascon, as many Gascons came here as soldiers. A Sam Gaskell aged seventy-seven in 1854 makes a solemn declaration about them when Josiah et uxor Mary sell three of the houses to my father in 1854 for £325.

HANDLOOM HOUSES, STENNER LANE



The other two houses were in the possession of the family who went to Castle Donington. They were valued at £100. Two daughters were to have £5 each out of them and the three sons to share alike. Two of the sons gave the third £30 for his share, and then one gave the other £40 for his half share, and then came and sold the two houses to my father for £230.

An enormous lot of children have been “bred, born, and reared,” as the country folk say in these houses, though I don’t think so many have been since town’s water was used instead of that from the holy well. I never heard of any child being hurt by tumbling down the steps. Dante’s words

How steep’s the path of one
Who travels up and down another’s stairs

never troubled them. Quaint and weird are some of the tales told of these “rude forefathers of the hamlet.” Some of them are not fit for publication, but here is an oft-told one of Billy Wood, the rattling of whose handloom I have heard.

He came to “aks a favver,” saying he “wur welly done” and had dug a grave for himself by the side of the handloom where his life’s work had been wrought. He had lived in the house for eighty “yeer and would fain be burit in it.” The grave “wur good gravel and he wur welly shrivelt up and could neer ‘urt no one.” Of course I agreed, but when I told my mother she was shocked and sent word to “old Kidd,” as we irreverently termed the Reverend W. J. Kidd and were often corrected for it, though he was a tottering old man when middle-aged. Mr. Kidd was worse shocked and all of a tremble to think what would become of the poor old sinner, to be buried like a dog in unconsecrated ground ; he would not have the burial service in a cellar, and there was such a fuss and commotion in the parish generally that Old Billy revived.

I advised him to go on living and never mind them. Then he told me he “wur bad at neet an our Bet says shall ur send for th’ passon, but I plunkt a yure out o’ me yed an’eld it in th’ candle leet an it frizzlet gayly, so I says nay, nay, no need o’ sendin’ for th’ passon yet when one’s yure frizzles an that uns.”

He did die at last and was buried in the churchyard, where we put on his gravestone he had been a bellringer for sixty-five years, but even the gravestone is gone now, and certainly it would have been quieter for him in the cellar.

When my mother last went to ask about him he “lay like a log of wood,” as she said, dead on the oaken settle. That was in 1874, and forty years afterwards the next tenant lay dead on the same settle, so I have got it in my “living” room now to lie on and try how it fits, and a very handsome piece of furniture it is, made of Didsbury oak with some inlay of other wood, never broken and with the original copper rings and webbing to hold the ropes below the cushion.

Old Billy left an old daughter named Betty. Neighbours said she “was no better than she should be,” and in those far off days I wondered who was better than they should be. She took in lodgers and was herself taken to a hospital, whereupon in some mysterious way the lodgers claimed and kept the furniture, which was all very good oak; a small corner cupboard is still in the house, but most of it got dispersed.

When I wrote of Billy in my first book on Didsbury I ended with

Our ingress is naked and bare,
Our progress is trouble and care,
Our egress is—no one knows where,
If you do well here—you’ll do well there,
I could tell you no more if I preached for a year.

Shortly afterwards I was in St. Ann’s Square when Canon Tonge pulled me up and admonished me severely.

He was shocked to think that anyone who had been brought up as I had been should give publicity to such wicked doggrel. I had to pacify him as best I could. I hope the reader is not tired of these

“Short and simple annals of the poor,
Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys and destiny obscure.”

“Ambition’s honoured fools” sometimes become prominent public men and these houses were condemned as insanitary when a Local Board of Health was formed for the district. The tenants carried on their primitive agriculture by using their refuse to manure their gardens and make the cabbages grow. The Local Board forbade it and I had to appear before that august body. Mr. Fuller was a very good chairman and he shut me up nicely when I told them emphatically that the tenants were all noted for their good health and longevity, and that two of the houses had only had two tenants in each since the day they were built nearly a hundred years before. He replied, “every owner of insanitary property always tells us that tale. What is to be done with the ash pits?” Mr. Hulse, a member of the Board, who was a scientific engineer, suggested balloons to convey the refuse away to somewhere else, the locality not being determined. Finally, instead of the houses being condemned the Board itself was condemned and done away with, many of the members who bothered about sanitary matters being like those who bothered themselves and others about the water from the holy well and then filled their premature graves.



Didsbury Church



Now that the long fight—the fight of twenty years to get a free library for Didsbury—is won, it is with special pleasure I can record its history.

For more than twenty years I advocated in our local councils a public library, but all the Conservative publicans, the Conservative builders, the Conservative butchers, the Conservative Wesleyans, and most of the Conservative lawyers steadily opposed it. Three supporters were the most at any time. Hearing of Carnegie's liberal offer to build libraries anywhere, I wrote to him and sent him copies of my books, though fully aware of that very useful and excellent scriptural proverb, "He that giveth to the rich shall surely come to want." I was already in want; I wanted money from him to build a library, but as long as our authorities in Withington would not adopt the Libraries Act, or provide the site for the library free that Carnegie always requires before he makes a donation, there was little hope of getting one.

The Act of amalgamation with the city specified that the Manchester Corporation were to provide two libraries in the Withington district within ten years, but they never attempted to build one.

For some unknown reason Carnegie never had helped Manchester, but Mr. Sutton, the chief librarian, met him and some of his advisers at meetings of the Library Association, and a correspondence began. In 1910 Carnegie's secretary "askt" questions. I quote from his letters: "The question might be askt, why should you spend £10,000 for a population of 10,000? . . . We have erected library bildings satisfactory to the communities for double the population at half the money you ask for the bildings. Your application could not be considered on such a basis."

1911. Carnegie promised £5000 each for libraries in Withington, Didsbury, and Chorlton, stipulating that the cost of the sites was not to be a charge on the library rate, somebody else must bear that first cost, and the amount was "to cover the cost of the library bildings complete, redy for occupancy and for the purpose intended. Before any expenditure in bilding or plans is incurd Mr. Carnegie's approval should be secured, to obtain which pleas send sketch plans."

Immediately, I tried to find a site for a library in Didsbury. All the skinflints advocated plots of land in side streets or somewhere back-o'-behind, but I would not consider any but the best. Very luckily I knew of an ideal site in the centre of the village. It had been the bowling-green of the old Grey Horse (now the Wellington) Inn. Sixty years ago my father bought the land surrounding it that Emmanuel Church could be built on part, and the rest of it was a mortgaged, awkwardly-shaped plot that caused me much trouble as his executor. Therefore I well knew the details: that the cottages in front of it were in several small owners' hands, and the price asked was reasonable.

The land was more than was required for a library, but fortunately its purchase would enable a great public improvement to be made to avoid the acute-angled corner at the Wellington; this justified the Withington Committee in buying the land for road improvement and allowing the library to be built on the residue.

November 1911. I persuaded both the Withington and the Libraries Committees to agree to this, and in due course the land was bought, but not paid for, or the purchase completed for a year after. As the Local Government Board refused its sanction to borrowing the requisite money, not one of the councillors for Didsbury being present at the hearing by the Board's Inspector, the only alternative was to pay cash for it, and this was done, and very thankful I was when the Council authorized the payment of the money.

Then I asked the city architect to design a Gothic library. Amid a chorus of objectors we were told Gothic was ugly, was costly, was not suited for Manchester, was very dark, would look like a church. No use to quote Ruskin: "Cast out all architecture but Gothic, the only architecture which Christian men should build, especially in our civic buildings. . . . The only rational architecture which can fit itself most easily to all worries." Why should not a library look like a church and be entered with reverence? Many of our old churches are charming buildings if the parsons wouldn't spoil them.

A Gothic elevation and plans were finished and sent to Carnegie in America, but for some unknown reason his men would not pass them: probably they thought the cost would exceed the £5000 "promist," for they had had several cases where the money granted had been spent and the building had not been completed. I was very impatient, but it was only another little blessing in disguise, for the Library Association had invited Carnegie to a reception and banquet at

the Hotel Cecil in London, and that some of us must attend.

2nd June, 1913. Ambassadors, Lord Mayors, Lord Provosts, Heads of Universities, of County Councils, and Intellectuals generally assembled at the Hotel Cecil to honour the old man and drink his health. The banquet began at eight o'clock and continued until some time the next morning. It may have been an American fashion to have things alternately scalding hot and icy cold. The effect of it was that when I got to bed I couldn't sleep for hunger, and yearned for a good bowl of porridge and milk. I never was so hungry in my life, unless it was in 1864 on returning from a small sporting trip from Bergen something went wrong with the steamer and we found ourselves off Helvoetsluys about twenty hours with nothing to eat.

Breakfast-time at the Cecil came at last, and fortified by porridge and bloaters and bacon, I determined to see Carnegie if possible—

“To beard the lion in his den,
The Douglas in his hall.”

With our chief librarian to take care of me, we went off in a taxi and had a memorable interview with a genial old man. When shown into his room, Mr. Carnegie introduced us to a stylish man, saying, “Isn’t he a good-looking young man, and such a nice talker? He wants to know what I am going to Berlin for, and if I told him he’d put it in all the American papers at once. Isn’t he a smart young man?” We were puzzled, until it was evident the man was a reporter for the Associated American Press and was being politely shut up by our admission and chaffed to go.

I had taken the precaution of having a copy of my last book with me containing an account of my pilgrimage to Dunfermline. I showed Carnegie a picture of his birthplace and a copy of the words he

wrote therein, 1909 : "First visit to my birthplace, the humble home of honest poverty, best heritage of all when one has heroine for a mother. A. C."

The old man looked keenly at it and at me. "Did you do this?" I said "Yes," and he replied very emphatically, "Shake." He went on reading: "The holy name of mother is but a name to the child of the rich, but to the poor boy his mother is mother, nurse, seamstress, teacher, inspirer, saint, his all in all: a more precious fortune than any rich man's son can have"; and said sharply, "Where did you get that from?" I told him. Again the reply was "Shake." Something about his spelling seemed to annoy him, but the tale that his favourite proverb, "Take care of your pence, and your pounds will take care of themselves," was from the Bible (where it isn't) caused him to say, "Yes, I did say it. Shake."

So we had several shakes, and might have passed a very pleasant hour if footmen had not been continually coming in with cards or notes, and Mrs. Carnegie came in for a short time. He wrote my name and address in a book, and said he would send me one of his books and speak to his secretary about the Didsbury library.

Within a week a short and simple sanction was sent authorizing us to build the library at Didsbury according to the plans inspected.

We went out through rows of callers, footmen, photographers, &c. If we had not been there very early for London, we might not have had an audience, so there was some good in having no sleep; and then we felt inclined to go on the spree, but as the taxi was waiting and we had been to Kew the previous afternoon, we went to the Zoo and quietly enjoyed ourselves there until the afternoon express would set me down at Didsbury.

What a crowded twenty-four hours it had been from

tea-time at Kew to tea-time at home ! The great gathering of literary and public men from all over the kingdom in the splendid halls of the Hotel Cecil, the endless succession of bits of something that were supposed to be good to eat, the various speeches in varied accents of many famous men, the few sleepless hours of hunger in bed, the exceedingly pleasant interview with the man who has given away more money than any other man in the world's history ever had to give, even if he had the will to give it. What would the canny, keen old Scot who had "bested" the cutest Yankees in America think of the hypocritical Kaiser when (or if) they talked of peace in Berlin ? That is beyond us.

My work was then to urge on the building of the library, to get the sanction of the Corporation to the buying of houses that stood between it and the main road. Two of them had their back premises close to the front entrance to the library. One of them was another old loom-house, and their value was very little, but they were in an important situation as we had bought all the land behind. It was left to me to buy them and also another two. I stipulated that I should be alone when seeing the owners, and at last that was agreed to, though very unusual in Corporation work. Having made many bargains in my time, I am certain that I could always do better by private interviews than by going with others or employing professional agents. It is commonly known that if a property owner is told his property is wanted by the Corporation he will ask double or treble its value. Probably he will. Then leave him with it a year or two and its value soon goes down, as tenants flit when they hear it is doomed, and he hears it will be scheduled in an Act of Parliament. Gradually he becomes more anxious to have done with the worry and to get the cash, and will accept a good offer which the Corporation generally will give.



THE WINDOW OF THE LIBRARY AT THE OLD PARSONAGE I DESIGNED 1904

The house faces 25 degrees west of south, or about S.S.W. (warmest aspect).

The local time is 9 minutes 2 seconds slow of Greenwich.

The best answer to the oft-asked question, "Does it (the sundial) keep good time?" is: Since the days of Hezekiah there is no authentic record of the sun not keeping good time, but if he doesn't he could be reported to the Watch Committee.

The several plots of land for this library when all together have been bought very cheap. If two cottages are worth £400 or up to £500 for the situation and what might be made of them, they were worth £600 to us, and that is what the vendor gradually came to from £1000.

I ought to mention there was a library in the church centuries before my time, but as the books were mostly sermons, "Godly books," and in the care of the parsons, they disappeared although they were chained to the desk. "A learned and Godly sermon made in the Latine tongue in S. Marie's in Oxenford, upon the Sunday after the Ascension, in the rayne of King Edward the Sixt, by the famous and excellent Clarke Master IEUUEL, late Bishop of Sarisbury," was there a few years since, for I copied the above from it. There was also a very large "New Testament with Expository Notes and Practical Observations," the gift of Thomas Fletcher in 1734. The Fletchers have been numerous in Didsbury for centuries. He was probably one of my kinsfolk. Kettlewell's Sermons, Burkitt's Commentary and others have disappeared. Could they have been condemned as fiction? We hear so much about fiction nowadays and the difficulty is to know where it isn't. When an old lady was asked if she really believed that Jonah was alive in the whale's belly and at once replied, "Yes, and if the bible said Jonah had swallowed the whale I should have believed it," we can only admire the faith and still wonder who is to define fiction. From the librarian's point of view, for instance, I am told Sir Walter Scott's novels are fiction, but not his poems. And the *Daily Liar* is said to be as true as Gospel by many fervent politicians.

When the books in the temporary library were being made ready for the new library it was reported that my "Didsbury" and "Didisburye in the '45" were worn out and too soiled for circulation, although they

had been strongly rebound. Constant use and dirty fingers had made some parts of them filthy and pages were missing. The latter had been in the library five years and had been taken out above a hundred times. I had considered it my worst book, but as I looked at the parts that were most worn I became interested, and here is a bit of a threeup at the "Cock" about ale, childer, and rheumatics between George Fletcher, a horseleech, Tippetymew, the moudy warp man, and



Betty Gaskell, the church charwoman, a prolific woman with a continual thirst. "Look at the children they rear nowadays on tea and slop. Where's their boanes and teeth? They'n gotten none worth havin, they wanten glasses to see wi, an they go bald in no time: they're hafe rotten. Now oursens are little throggles as wick as a wisket o' wick snigs, fatter till theirsens though theyse fed on nobbut buttermilk and taters, an thinks well o' gettin bacon, or a fish on Sundays."

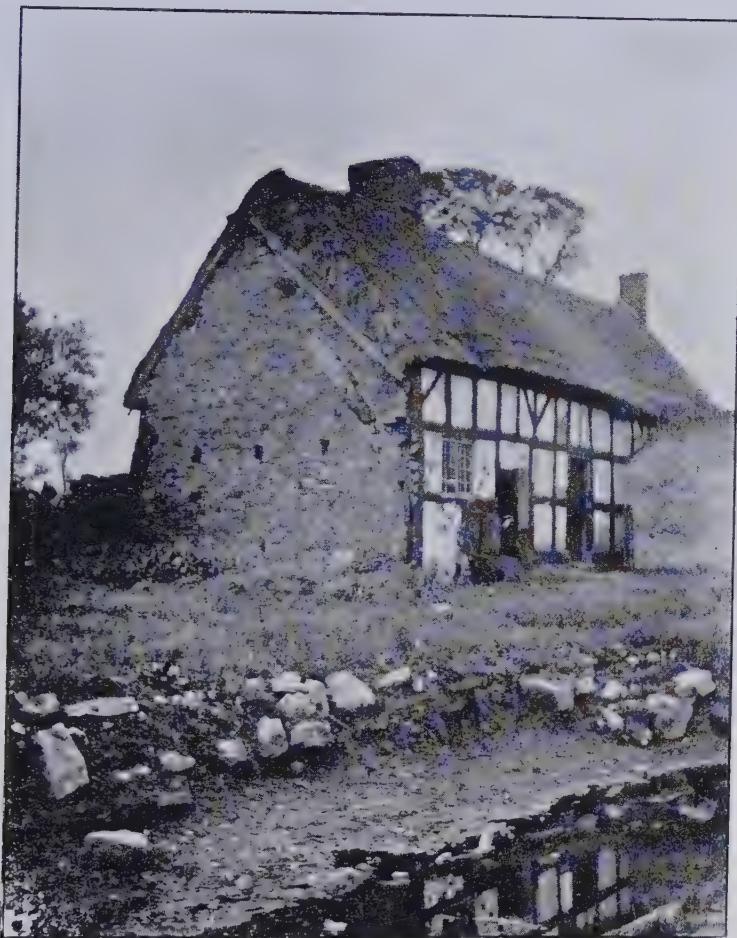
At the end of the book is an appendix, the record of a wonderfully interesting talk I had with an old

woman who died soon after. It was in 1891 in my hunt for legends of old Didsbury I was advised to see a Mrs. Howard who lived at the last cottage in the Millgate. Her maiden name had been Birch. Here follows parts of her tale with remarks of my own in brackets.

"I dare say I can tell you as much about Didsbury as most of folk, for I were born at the farm agen the church, where Highbank now stands, (I remember Betty Peacock's sawpit being there) an our family have lived in th' parish for above three hundred years that they could trace. They did ner allus live in one house mind ; part o' th' time they lived at Goosecroft, that's where they call Barlow Moor now. They came fro' Birch, near Manchester, at first. They were allus queer folk, th' Birches were, rayther too fond o' fightin, an yet were mostly scholars, an if onythink partikler happent i' th' parish they'd a written it down on a bit o' sheepskin and a kept it ; an in time them bits o' sheepskin filled an oaken chest there was.

"Did ever I see them, did you say? I'm like as if I could see them now ; but keep quiet, Mr. Moss, an I'll tell you all about them, though they're all gone. Some on em went back to th' times when Didsbury Church was made o' wood and belonged to th' Roman Catholics. When Reformation was, we turned our religion same as th' rest o' folks turned theirs, but we allus kept Church an King men, and we're for Church an King yet : they'd a shed the last drop o' blood for Church an King. There never was but one Radical in th' family an he fought for Oliver Cromwell ; his name was Thomas. Yea, there was my Uncle John, he wur a Leveller, an on th' hustings with Hunt at Peterloo, you've heard o' that happen."

I am glad of the opportunity of drawing attention to the origin of our old church. It has been customary to say it was first built in 1235, that date being given



TIMBER-FRAMED HOUSE IN THE MILLGATE

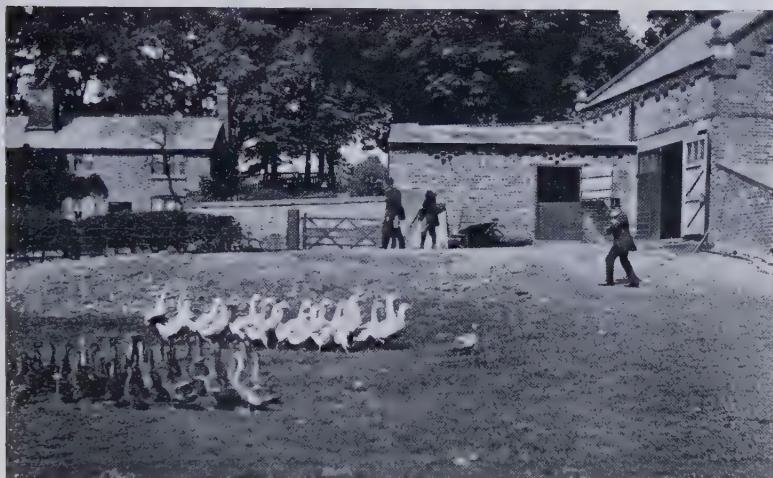
The gable formed by the two halves of a split bent oaktree converging from the ground to the ridge of roof, but bricked over at a much later date. The tree behind was a magnificent yew, with a trunk two feet in diameter. It was made into gateposts and whitewashed, but after my public remonstrance an old gentleman bought the remains to make into a sideboard.

in the history of Didsbury by the Rev. John Booker, who was son-in-law of the Bishop and therefore deemed infallible, whereas he was very inaccurate, though once upon a time it would have been almost blasphemous to doubt anything he wrote. I think he misread Hollingworth's *Mancuniensis* of 1650, where the reference is to the time of the Domesday survey. Hollingworth also says: "it may be the present structure of Didsbury Chapell is more antient than the present structure of Manchester Church as also their Font was much bigger, because when dipping of children and baptizing of Heathens grew more out of use, then the Baptisteries were lesse and lesse."

In one of the deeds of the very old Roman Catholic family of Barlow of Barlow mention is made of Alexander, capellanus (chaplain) of Diddesbury, and as the deed is without date it is probably an early one. I believe the first church at Didsbury would be timber framed and thatched as all the old houses were, that it stood on the site now marked by the round pillars and arches of the present church, and was probably built near to the holy well in the burh, burg, or stronghold of some Anglo-Saxon named Diddes, or something similar, there being several variations of the name in our southern counties. The water for baptisms was always brought from the holy well when I was churchwarden, as it always had been, and for many years afterwards the ceremony was observed.

"Can I tell you onythink about the Highlanders in '45? Yes, I can tell you mony things if I've time. My grandfather was a lad then; he'd used to take us childer on his knee and tell us things as happent, but when he spoke of th' rebels and beheading them, my heart failed me, I couldn't bide to hear. I was only th' younger end on em. Grandfather's bin dead sixty year or more, fully that. He were eighty-five, an two yards high, an as straight as a stick when he died.

He lies close to your garden by th' lane side. Some of his sons were taller than him, one of em was in th' Life Guards, but they're aw gone now. If he wasn't sure o' th' date of anythink he'd say to us 'Thee go and fetch yon bit o' sheepskin out o' th' box, it'll tell thi.' Some on em were very old and faded, and hard to read, th' writin' was different in them days. His father was driving his cows at th' end o' Dark Lane, where th' murder was, near to Birchfields, when th' Highlanders came



SOME MEMBERS OF THE AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY 1893.

an took th' boots off his feet: but they was only clogs he'd made hissen, made o' wood with a bit o' leather, so they wouldner ave em but threw them into th' river, an they went floatin down th' stream. They took all th' horses in the country; they couldn't take his, cos he had none, they was cows he ad. Horses were ner so common then. Which way did they come? Why, along th' old road by Parr's Wood, Burnage, and Slate" (Slade Hall).

"Did I ever hear o' George Fletcher's head being stuck up in London? Of course I did; but I tell you

my heart used to fail me at hearing o' them things. I remember old George Fletcher that was called after his uncle George who was beheaded. Grandfather used to say he was a bit proud, cos when common folk got hanged, Fletchers got beheaded, showin' they was better than common folk. He was only a littlish chap but he thot rayther much o' hissen.

"There was another man had his head taen off in that affair. He lies i th' churchyard with his head fastened to his body by a broad black ribbon. His name was Seymour, an his head was cut off at Lancaster, or somewhere north. He was akin to us, an was buryet in one of our graves at night, for they daredner do it openly. He lies near to th' sundial in one of our graves for he was akin to us I tell ye though he wasner a Didsbury man. He was great uncle on the mother's side to my aunt Nanny, her name was Hannah, she'd marrit her cousin Birch of Ardwick an her aunt left her Seymour's picture: an our folk saw him in 'is coffin with th' broad black ribbon holdin' on his head."

(I had never heard of this man either in history, tradition, legend, tale, or song, and yet the old lady's tale was too precise in its details to have been invented; even the man's name savoured of "Church and King."

There were more Radicals among the Birch family than the old lady remembered. She would naturally veer round to the "Respectable" side in the Toryism of Didsbury. Oliver Cromwell had two Colonels Birch. John is buried at Weobley, where I came across his grave. Thomas is charged with plundering the cash and charter chest of the college of Christ, or the old church, Manchester, and imprisoning Hollingworth the historian and Fellow of the College.)

"Do I know how th' Duke's Hillock came by its name? Aye, cos there were two Dukes buried there at th' time of th' rebellion."

(The Dukes of Perth and Atholl may have harangued

the natives on the village green as the Highlanders waited for the rough bridge of poplars to be made across the river, but they were not buried there.)

"Cheddle first stone bridge was built in 1777, an Chandley as built it was kilt by th' scaffolding falling on him. How do I know? I knows very well for my Uncle William an old Sammy Gaskill th' last parish clerk were born i th' same year, three sevens. There



were two wooden bridges afore it. One fell i' flood time and old Mary Astle, a higgler, was like to a bin drownt.

"Are we owt akin to John Gaskill who was shut up in Gibraltar for twenty-four year? I don't know. He is buryt here. Th' Gaskills were ner very warlike. They were ill tempered enoo; they were that; but they would ner fight. Did you ever hear of th' ghost at th' Swivel house? My mother saw it an could a told you everything th' old lady wore, and what was in her hair,

an how she glided and beckoned—so. That's her chair you are sitting on ”

Then the old lady showed me how the ghost glided and beckoned, and an awesome feeling came over us. It had gradually become quite dark. I had been sitting for two hours in wet clothes in a lonesome cottage with an old woman, six cats and a stuffed parrot. My two dogs were whining and scratching outside; sniffing at the smell of cats while the cats blinked and gibbered at one another in the flickering firelight. Might they all be witches, bewitch me and then fly up the chimney ?

The night was wild and dark as I groped my way across the fields for home. “The fatal bellman which gives the sternst good night” screeched at me as I passed musing and mourning over the loss of the bits of sheepskin with the faded writings telling the history of the Didsbury of our forefathers. A tale half told that no one can be called up to tell again. What would I not give for them? Still, I had learnt more in one evening than in a month’s work. The old lady’s pride in her family and in her long descent had helped her in life’s long struggle with poverty. As old farmers say, “breed’ll tell.”

At her death I bought from her daughter the oak chest shown on page 31. Her grandfather had had it made from home-grown oak. The carpenter, being named Savage, may have been a descendant of the Savages who were Lords of Cheadle Savage in bygone times. The many pieces of home-made furniture in this house, often made from home-grown oak, ought to be very valuable to the generations that are yet to come. Gillows (of London) surprised me with some of the values they put on things in the priced inventory they made of the contents of this Old Parsonage. There is a very tall plain grandfather’s clock, oak case, round brass face, one finger, works for only thirty hours for one winding up. I bought it for £1 from one of

the Gaskill family, but had better not say what Gillows valued it at. A whistle-handle tankard of my grandfather's of the time of Charles II was another surprise, and they are valued at commercial values, nothing for sentiment. The Parliamentary Committee and the wealthy men at the head of the City Council in 1910 superciliously scorned even the commercial value, though that adds up to £3000.



When Heaton Park was bought our Corporation could have bought everything in the house for very little. Many fixtures they were entitled to: other things were knocked off very cheap to realize big prices afterwards. There was a set of sixteen chairs and two armchairs in the dining-room, just the same as those shown on page 31, and for that set Pierpont Morgan ultimately gave a thousand guineas. I believe the four I bought had come out of the hall that is now the Wesleyan College, and a large mahogany wardrobe

we have that came from there is valued by Gillows at £42. Close to me is a "grog chair" that came from a Mrs. Bancroft, an old Didsbury family, in the Grange cottage, Millgate, and there are many other things.

The completion of this book has been delayed that a record of the opening of our public library in Didsbury might be included in it, and the opening of the library has been much delayed by indirect consequences of the war; meantime other things have happened, and the book has grown.

On page 8 I have told how the good old Tories in 1855 objected to the lighting of Didsbury by gas, and now after spending no end of money on gas mains, and gas lamps, and men to light them, we have in March 1915 gone back to the primitive state of sixty years ago. My second childhood seems to have the bogey tales of my first revived. We were then told of witches who came down the chimneys at night and turned the milk sour or some other devilment, and only a year since I caught an owl and some pigeons that came down the chimney. At Standon Hall before the big chimney of the hall was altered they kept an old wig of the parson's thrust up it to fear the witches away, and as that parson was a good one and fond of cockfighting it was said to be very efficacious.

I once read *Essays and Reviews* or some other wicked book, and told my aunt I did not believe there was a devil. She replied, "You may believe it or not, sir, as you like, but he'll fetch you some night as sure as you are there." And, now, we have orders to have no lights as some flying devils may drop infernal bombs that will make holes in the roof, spoil all the bedclothes, and murder us in our beds.

One of our kindred in the country who was careful about witches engaged such a nice young girl as servant, and finding her religious education had been greatly neglected taught her how to be good on Sunday

evenings. The poor girl had never been taught to pray and did not know what it meant: but on being assured that the Lord would grant her prayer if she were good, and being pressed to pray aloud for whatever was the dearest desire of her heart, she burst out with "Oh Lord, send my little Willie lots of fat bacon." Little Willie had never been heard of before, but the prayer was a good one, and there is no harm in wishing or praying that everyone whether they have been bewitched or not may have lots of fat bacon.



The visit of the Manchester Amateur Photographic Society in June 1893, that is mentioned on pages 49 and 50, seems worthy of a better record and acknowledgment. At that time the art of taking a sharp photograph of anything in motion was only in its infancy, and as I dabbled a bit in it myself I invited the society to spend an afternoon with me and I would ride on horseback about my field while they took shots at me from wherever they wished. Very few members obtained anything they would show of the horse in motion. One is re-

produced here, page 159, it is by Mr. A. Collins. Several of them made good snapshots of us, that is of the mare and myself, when we were still. I thought the one on page 145 taken by Mr. J. W. Wade was the best, but all of his have faded. Mr. Fleming took the one on page 51; I do not remember who took the others. There were about a dozen altogether. Mr. Jas. Shaw snapped the old gander's head as it shot out to see who was



cackling outside the goosecrew. Both parties were extraordinarily quick and very much surprised at one another. Mr. Shaw also took the haycart on page 163. Mr. W. G. Coote was the photographer of the haycart on page 161; the upright tall figure in it was my groom, an ex-guardsman named Crispin. He and the gardener are also in Mr. Shaw's picture. The one of the old sow with her dozen porkers, page 171, is the best snapshot I have taken: look at the curly tails of the little grunters.

My note-books contain innumerable facts in the natural history of Didsbury, rare birds, rare plants, the growth of the trees in the garden, abnormal weather, the arrival of the migrants, far too many to

mention here; but there shall be one page on what is happening now in the sweet springtide, the happiest days of all the glad new year.

"The daffodils that come before the swallow dares" are fading away and the swallows come to their appointed time, I expect the first about the 26th of April. This year three pairs are whirling and twittering round the haylofts before Mayday when the well is garlanded with flowers—the semi-wild geese in the orchard have their little gullies that peck grass for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four and increase in size and weight ten per cent. every day.



The picture shows a greylag gander who paired with his grand-daughter, (that being allowed by geese,) and had a happy family. A half-bred one that was hatched here twenty-two years ago broke his wing when fighting, never flew again, and is still hobbling about. This evening in Didsbury fields I have heard the cuckoo's wandering voice, the call of the partridge, the wail of the lapwing, the ecstatic song of the lark, the blackbird's mellow whistle, the cock pheasant and the wild duck fly, and the sandpipers flit over the river querulous at its queer smell. Broods of young throstles are in the garden. Blackbirds and robins have built their nests against the walls of the house—a good omen—and where the tadpoles thrive by the Playing Fields a grass snake feeds on them.

15th May 1915.—A memorable day for Didsbury. In the perfect weather of May at its best the free library was opened by as many people (about 600) as could crowd into it, others having to wait outside.

The ceremony began by Councillor Bowden presenting a gilt key to Alderman Moss, with which he opened the door and entered. In the presence of members of the City Council and magistrates Alderman Plummer, the chairman of the libraries committee, called on him to declare the library open to all. Alderman Moss told the audience the gift of £5000 by Carnegie was spent on the building only, not on land, fixtures, furniture, books or maintenance. He explained how the books were bought, saying the ratepayers chose the best and wisest men among them to represent them on the City Council: the Council chose their most intellectual members to be on the libraries committee, and this committee of picked men selected a sub-committee consisting of their most learned omniscients to buy the books. Omniscience often failed, and Alderman Moss confessed that he had been brought up in the provision trade where provisions were tested by a knife or borer being thrust into the goods, then withdrawn and smelt, the smell of the ham or butter clung to the knife and the quality was discovered. In a similar way when books came with leaves uncut a paper-knife had to be used, and when smelt, that was enough for some books. A quicker way was to feel the weight of the book, and if for its size it were very light it would, like an addle egg, be worth very little. He had the greatest pleasure in declaring the library free, and for that evening the garden of the Old Parsonage should be free also.

Dr. Waddy Moss the Principal of the Wesleyan College, the three councillors for the ward, and Alderman Heald the chairman of the Liverpool libraries and owner of many acres of Didsbury, made complimentary remarks on the “open access” and perfect equipment of the library.



THE FREE LIBRARY, DIDSBURY



1915. For the New Year I had determined to offer all that part of my property extending from the Fletcher Moss Playing Fields to Stenner Lane to the Corporation if I could retain the use of it for my life. If I simply left it in my will the lawyers say there would be danger from the Statute of Mortmain; and if I sold it at a nominal price it would be an evasion of the Statute, therefore I determined to offer it at half its value. Altogether there are eight acres of freehold land, free from all ties or charges, with dwelling-house, farm-buildings and long frontage to the old highway known as Stenner Lane. I considered its value to be £1400 to £1500, and offered it to the Corporation for £700 if I could retain the use of it for my life and at my death they would add it all to the Playing Fields, which would then extend from the Stenner to the Millgate and be about twenty acres in all.

The offer was sent to a valuer for report and here is a shortened copy of his report.

"I have inspected the two freehold fields containing 7.301 acres in hand estimated rental £20 the stable and freehold detached dwelling-house in Stenner Lane let at a gross rental of £31 per annum containing together say 8 acres.



THE HOME FARM

"There is a Tithe Rent Charge of 10/- per annum on the land.

"I am of opinion that the present value is twelve hundred pounds (£1200) free from any restrictive user.

"With regard to the offer to sell at £700 subject to certain suggested limitations this would depend upon the age of the vendor. If the vendor lived another six or seven years the interest on the £700 together with the rent and profits would amount to a little over £500 bringing up the purchase money to its present value.

"If the vendor lived another ten years the total purchase money would be increased to £1576 and in the case of a period of fourteen years the total amount would be £2,035.

"These figures are based upon the 4 per cent table."

That valuation is misleading, unfair, and untrue, the half-truth that may be worse than the other thing. Adopting the valuation of the property to be fair, and what is called the expectation of life, six or seven years, also to be fair for a man of 72, the rest of the valuation should be simply what will the £700 amount to at compound interest for six or seven years. At 4 per cent. it would amount to about £900. If ten or fourteen years are reckoned for, why should not death in a year or so also be mentioned. But to assume that the Corporation are also entitled to "the rents and profits" of the property in addition to the interest on their money is folly. The £1200 worth of property is offered for £700 on condition the vendor keeps the rents and profits for his life, his life at 72 being worth six or seven years.

Where do the "profits" come in from a home farm where a gentleman keeps cows and other things for his own amusement and is much more likely to have losses? If he has any public work to do can he stay at home to watch the hens lay, and count the eggs? His milk



BETTY AND HER DOZEN PORKERS

They were very good in life and in death.

From a lifelong experience of farming, I am sure the only way to realize the estimated profits on the land in hand and the compound interest thereon, would be to breed pigs. A good sow like Betty, shown here with her full dozen in happy family, would have two litters in a year, and as the young breed at six months old, therefore, if half of them were sows and as good as their mother, they might have each their dozen at the end of the year. There would then be 96 young pigs, and the grandmother could be made into fine American Roll Bacon. Assuming that half of the 96 were like their mother, and mothers themselves and their progeny, at the end of the second year there would be 744 pigs: over 6000 at the end of the third year after hundreds had been eaten by a grateful public, and millions in the years the Corporation's valuer had reckoned his compound interest; but then, in the meantime the officials of the Sanitary Committee would have had fits and served notices innumerable to prevent the poor farmer utilizing his land to the best advantage. *A reductio ad absurdum.*

Expert witnesses are known to be the highest class of witnesses, and expert valuers are too high or too deep for anyone but officials, the innocent councillor chosen for his politics or his fluency is mystified by them.

probably costs a shilling a quart, and his home-fed, home-cured fat bacon a shilling a pound. What a "fat" lot the valuer knows about the "profits" on land "in hand" as he terms it. He also says there is a tithe of ten shillings on the land, and I repeat there is no tithe or charge of any sort on the land.

A valuation like this one just pleases the ordinary councillor who objects to spending money on anything, even on green fields for playing in. He says, "What! the £700 grown to £2000 in a few years; and after that more money to be spent on bowling greens and games! Chuck it out!"

As members are elected to the City Council for their good looks, their politics, or their fluency of speech they cannot be expected to be omniscient and therefore they rely on the opinions of their officials and the valuations of "experts." It is touching to see with what childlike simplicity even Aldermen mildly follow the lead of their "experts."

Well—barring accidents—the public will have the Stenner meadows some day. But what about the "Home"? Is it to go to the place that is paved with good intentions? Other men with less wealth but broader views may guide the City Council some day: but if not there are good men who are not in the Council. Let me recapitulate the offer and the rejection of the proposed "Home for poor Gentlefolk."

The whole of my landed estate I offered to the Corporation for a charity if they would get a clause in one of their Acts of Parliament to make it legal, small annuities being reserved to my sister and brother who are nearly as old as I am myself. The property, that is the land and buildings, I valued at £10,000. The City Surveyor's valuation was £9,250; a very fair valuation. A professional was called in to give his report, it being well known to all the professional

HOME FOR POOR GENTLEFOLK. DIDSBVRY.

FOR

FLETCHER MOSS ESQ., J.P.



ORIGINAL PLAN

valuers when valuing for the Corporation they must depreciate enormously. The money that was to be spent on the building of the Home up to £5000 was ready to be secured as soon as Parliamentary sanction was obtained. The contents of the Old Parsonage were valued by Gillows of London to be worth £3000 and were given in. The Town Clerk himself inspected the deeds and said they were in order. A competent architect prepared plans and the Council passed them. The printed agreement signed by Alderman Copeland and myself recites that the Council were not to be called upon for the building of the Home, and the control of the charity would be theirs. The Parliamentary sub-committee abruptly broke off consideration of the matter, and although they have obtained another Act of Parliament since then nothing further has been said and I have never had even the courtesy of a reply or a simple "thank you." A contemptuous, silent snub, "pour encourager les autres," and expenses to pay. Therefore, I now publish my statement of the case for the public to judge. In some of the conditions changes have come already. By clause eleven of the agreement the Corporation were empowered to appropriate the Cock Inn and outbuildings and on their site to erect a Public Library. That is unnecessary now, as, thanks to Carnegie, a library is built, but that site was in reserve to fulfil his conditions and now it allows a better scheme for the Home. If one were built on that site it would have a frontage to Wilmslow road of 24 or 25 yards with a depth of from 30 to 40 yards, giving about 800 square yards for the building, its eastern aspect being as shown on page 33, its southern front opening on to the Old Parsonage garden.

I have not the means to carry it out, for ever since 1902 my investments have been constantly decreasing, but if some philanthropist helps, all I want for the site is my life interest. It would pay the brewery company

who own the Didsbury Hotel to buy the right of license and shut up the Cock. The Trustees of Mayes's charity (I being one) know that scores of the poor old women to whom they allow five shillings a week, or half-a-crown in addition to the Government pension, have to pay two shillings or half-a-crown a week for a single room in a back slum, and nothing could be better for them than a room in a good home in the purer air of Didsbury.



STANDON HALL FROM THE SOUTH

The plans show it was intended to erect the Home on what is now the kitchen garden of the Old Parsonage, and to pull down the five houses in Stenner Lane that would be in front of it, but if it were erected on the site of the Cock Inn there would not be any need to take down the houses, or others could be built further back.

One of my dreams has often been that if I built a Home it should in its exterior resemble Standon Hall, as being begotten by that beautiful and hospitable old

Home. Houses have been built and named after it in Africa, America, and New Zealand, where those it sheltered have wandered. The photograph I took of it twenty years ago shows my aunt with a daughter, three granddaughters, and my mother on the right. The sketch for an ideal Home on similar lines has been given to me by Mr. John Swarbrick. That front would face to the road to Cheadle, as is shown on page 33; the side would be open to the garden of the Old Parsonage facing the church and the open country beyond. I could fancy the old folks saying "it's a chip of the old block"; "a rattling good pup," or "a promising filly off the old mare."

It happens that I know the date when Standon Hall was rebuilt, for I remember going there with Mr. Joseph Walker, who had large interests in horses and carriages. He made some remark about an immense cumbersome harvest waggon, with wooden axles. My uncle in his slow emphatic manner told him "that waggon was made new with all the latest improvements the year we were married and the house rebuilt." Those events had happened nearly fifty years before (1841), and we were told of the enormous number of winter-felled oaks that were required to build the house, slabs of them being taken to build the waggon.

In my old age I have begun to save local oak trees, but as in many other things I am too late.

Of the old ladies at tea at Standon Hall as shown in my "Folk-lore," my aunt has since then passed away nearing ninety-eight, my mother nearing ninety-one, the other aunt is still alive at ninety-three, and a relative who was there but not at the tea-table has gone at ninety. They were all sensible, healthy, and happy.

A clause in the lapsed agreement recited that the Old Parsonage with its contents and garden were to be preserved as nearly as possible as they now are, perhaps for a residence of the master, or manager, the



STANDON HALL, 1894

M

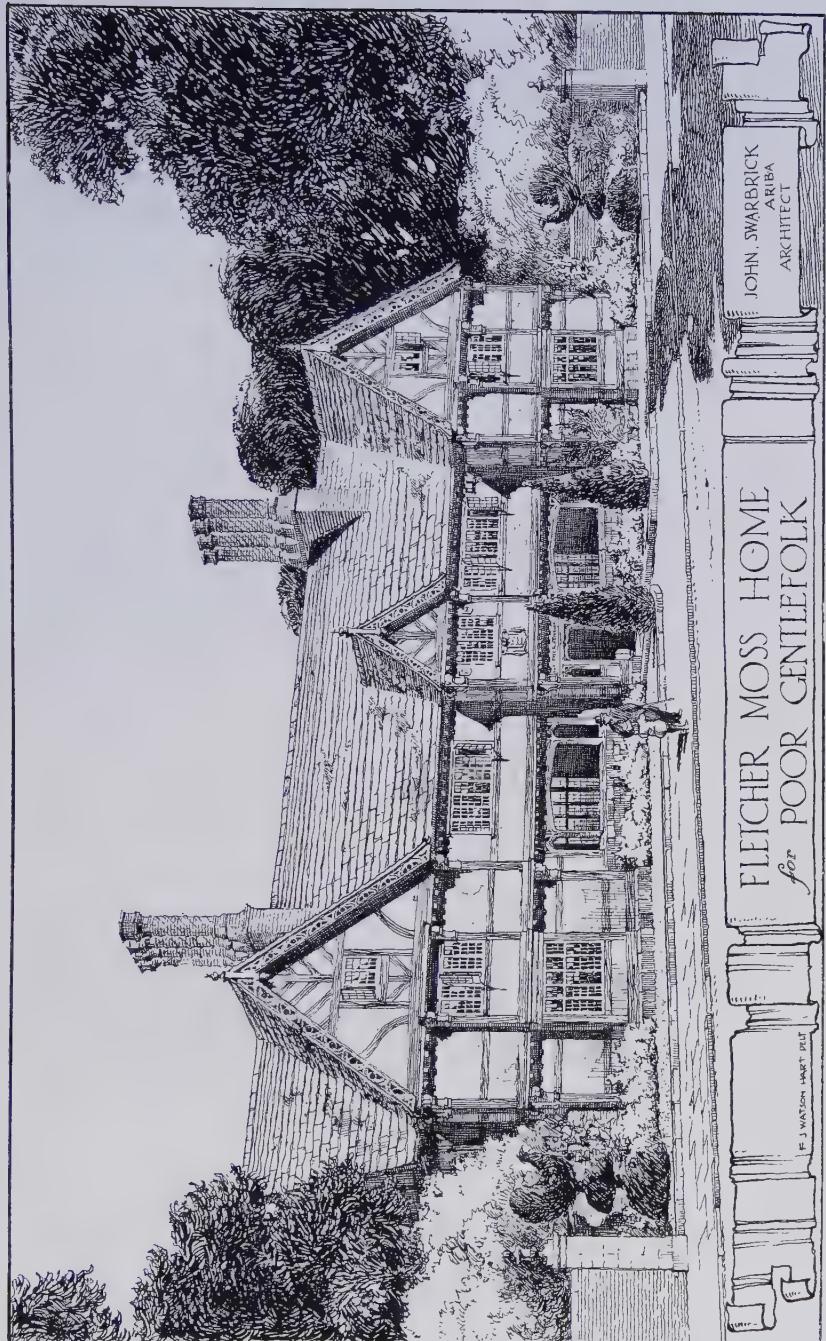
public having access to the garden and at times to the house.

It is natural for anyone to consider most that for which he has striven most and enjoyed most. I have tried for many years to live my life usefully and unostentatiously, leaving something for the generations that are to come after me round the home where my life has been happily spent. I have tried to secure three great blessings for the public—Playing Fields, a Public Library, and a Home for Poor Gentlefolk, all to be under the control of the Corporation, who metaphorically turned up their nose and sniffed.

Part of the Playing Fields has been secured : no need to go into what brought that about. I would like to see every acre of the adjoining low land as far as the river and some of the high land secured while there is yet time. In another fifty years Didsbury will have a population of 150,000 or more, according to its late increase, and there are no signs of that rate decreasing. Are there to be no playgrounds for its youth ? “The glory of a young man is his strength.” One of the keenest joys on earth is that of a young man who rejoices to run a race. There is no place in Didsbury or its neighbourhood to-day where any man or boy can run two hundred yards on the straight ; and now they have one field for football they tell me Rugby football is too rough for them, they have not been used to it, for the Corporation does not allow it. Their hearts and lungs and joints and sinews would be better for it before the drill sergeant is required.

The tale of the library is told. Shakspere would be mindful of himself when he wrote, “My library was dukedom enough.” Or in older English from one who had wandered “wyde in ye worlde,”

“For if hevene be on this erthe and ese to any soul
It is in buxumnesse and bokes to rede and to lerne.”



FLEICHER MOSS HOME
for poor gentlefolk

JOHN SWARBRICK
ARCHITECT



A SUGGESTED REVIVAL OF STANDON HALL

The Home for Poor Gentlefolk. Those to whom “the sorrow’s crown of sorrow is rememb’ring happier things.” Those who have pondered over the troubles of Job and wondered why the devil was allowed to ask the Lord, “Doth Job fear God for nought?” and then strip him to the direst poverty and smite him with sore boils and miserable comforters. There are thousands who wonder why they have been cast down from affluence to poverty through no fault of their own. My little scheme would have helped some. My mother often quoted

“I can no more though poor the offering be.”

Through the dark evenings of this war-shadowed winter it has been a good solace to me to write this book. My intention was merely to make a record of what I had seen and done in Didsbury, a great part of it fast passing into oblivion, and great difficulty I often had to get at dates and facts, and searching for one thing disclosed another altogether forgotten, until at last I may quote the immortal author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*:

“I set pen to paper with delight and so I penn’d
it down, until at last it came to be,
For length and breadth, the bigness which you see.”

What about the local history? The great Gibbon said that “history is the register of the crimes, the follies, and misfortunes of mankind.” I have not registered all the crimes and follies of my neighbours and great men or even of myself, but perhaps there are enough recorded for the present. As far as it goes it certainly complies with Ruskin’s definition of what history should be. “The only history worth reading is that written at the time of which it treats, the history of what was done and seen, heard out of the mouths of the men who did and saw. One fresh draught of such

history is worth more than a thousand volumes of abstracts."

Well, here is some more of the history of Didsbury from one who did and saw and wrote.

"I have done the state some service and they" don't "know it.
No more of that. Speak of me as I am,
Of one that lov'd not wisely, but too well."

"Here's a sigh to those who love me
And a smile to those who hate."

Meminisse juvo



As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you;
and ye shall be comforted.



COTTAGES in ye HIGH STREETE where WATTS FOLLY was built.

Index

- ABSOLUTION, 22
Advowson, 120
Albert Park, 48
Aldermen, 86
Allotments, 39, 40, 61-68
Amalgamation with Manchester, 58, 79, 84-86, 94
Ashton, Mr., 39, 110
Ashton, Mrs., of Ford Bank, 64
Ashton, T. G., 64
Assize Courts, Sworn in at, 76
Astle, Mary, 159
Athletic Sports, 24
- BACHELOR benefactors of Manchester, 96
Baguley Hospital, 72-74
Ball, G., 102
Bancroft, Mrs., 162
Barlow Hall, 40-46
Beaver Road, 101
Beer and Bible, 66
Bentham, Alfred W., 59
Birch family, 154-158
Birds, 164, 165
Birley, Hugh, 102
Birley, Miss, 132
Birley family, 59
Blacklock, Charlie, 24
Blair, Mr., 57
Bland and Linney Charity, 58-62
Blomiley family, 4, 99, 132
Boathouse Inn, Northen, 13, 17
Books, chained, at the Church, 152
- Books, choosing for the library, 166
Boswell, George, 17
Bowden, Counc., 166
Bribes for going to Church, 20
Brockbank, William, 45
Buckingham, Duchess of, 56
Building line, struggle over, 50
Burrows, Gilbert, 60
“Butter,” 82, 83
Buttermilk and potato swallowing, 19
- CANDIDATE for Exchange Ward, 80, 82
Caricatures, 85
Carnegie, Andrew, 55, 145-149, 166
Cash family, 6
Cemetery, 49
Charities, 58, 60, 62, 69
Charity Commissioners, 59, 60, 61
Cheadle, 25, 138
Cheadle Bridge, 159
Choosing the best, 94
Chorlton, Counc. J. C., 64, 72, 74
Christian Science, 88, 89
Church and State, 9
Church collections, 20-22
Church “livings” bought and sold, 102, 120
Church of England, 101, 102
Church, Parish, 18, 119, 156
Churchwardens, 2-4, 18-24, 109

- Churchyard "restoration," 117-124, 134
 City Council, 8, 18, 80, 82, 87, 174
 City Councillors, 171, 172
City News, 59, 80, 118, 128
 Clerk's House, 30
 Clock tower, memorial to Dr. Rhodes, 96
 Clubs worse than public-houses, 66
 Coaching, Cheadle and Manchester, 25-28
 Cock Inn, 8, 12, 30-36, 97, 98, 104, 109, 126, 174
 Cold-water baths, 16
 Colley, Davies, 103
 Collins, Dr., 64
 Conservative Club, 62, 67
 Conservatives, 55, 91, 145
 Constitutional Club, 62, 66, 67
 Cook, Counc., 124-126
Coombs v. Brockbank, Lawsuit, 48
 Coombs, Mr., 52, 55, 57
 Copeland, Ald., 174
 Corn, buying, 49
 Coronation festivities, 109-112
 Counsel's opinion on Charity, 61
 County Police Court, 76
 Cow-houses, concrete floors for, 70
 Cows, good milking, 93
 Cricket Club, 24
 Crofton, H. T., 13, 61, 64
 Crops, worst ever known, 25, 28
 Crossing river on ice, 16
- DEATH duties, 104-108
 Derby, Lord, 74
 Destructor, 49
 Didsbury, books on, worn out, 152
 Dissenters, 9
 Dorrington, Mr., 4
 Duke's Hillock, 158
- EDUCATION, religious, 102, 103
 Edwards, Mr., 91, 92
 Egerton, Lord, 45, 46, 56
 Eggs, selling on a Sunday, 20-22
 Elections, 41, 44, 45, 62, 63, 66, 67, 87-93
 Electors, Address to, 89-90
 Emmanuel Church Bazaar, 10, 11
 Evans, Mr., 96
- FAMILIES, old, 138-144
 Feilden, Robert, 99
 Female Friendly Society, 128-134
 Ferry across river, 16
 Fletcher family, 152
 Fletcher, Geo., 157, 158
 Floods, 38, 39
 Food, dear, 28
 Football, 115, 116
 Footbridge, iron, 61, 68
 Footpaths, closing and narrowing, 40, 46
 Ford Bank, 110
 Ford, Canon, 97, 98
 Friendships made in public life, 66
 Funds, secret, 52, 53
 Furniture, old, 31, 161
- GADDUM, G. H., 41, 44, 45, 49, 52, 64, 95, 100, 101, 102
 Gamefowls, 20, 92, 94
 Gas lighting, 8, 162
 Gas, supply of, 8
 Gaskell family, 139, 140, 159
 Gates of Hell, Didsbury, 125
 Gatley Carrs, 10
 Gatley Ford, 40, 100
 Gawsworth, Rectory gate notice, 65
 Geese, 164, 165
 Ghosts, 30-32, 36, 159, 162
 Glover, Mr., 88
 Goldschmidt, Ald., 114

- Gomer and Judy, 109
 Good Samaritan, 116
 Gothic Architecture, 147
 Gradisky, Mr., 91, 92
 Grange Estate, 106, 114
 Gravestones, 122-124, 134
 Great south road, widening of, 95
 Green, Rev. R., 64
 Grey Horse Inn, Barlow Moor, 23,
 109
- HADKINSON, Daniel, 16, 22
 Hampson family, 4, 18, 128, 132,
 139-144
 Hand-loom houses, 132, 133, 141
 Hand-loom weavers, 132, 142
 Hand-loom weaving, 2, 136
 Hanging Ditch, 80
 Harrop, Ald., 97, 98
 Harwood, Counc., 72
 Harwood, Sir John, 54
 Heads taken off, 158
 Heald, James, 66, 166
 Heald, W. N., 62, 64
 Heaton Norris, 60
 Hewart, Gordon, 95
 Highlanders in '45, 156
 Historians on truth, 1
 "Holy well," 2-8, 134, 144, 156
 Home for Poor Gentlefolk, 104,
 172-180
 Hopkinson, C., 64
 Horkheimer, Mr., 46
 Horse and Horticulture Show, 24,
 114, 115
 Horse, well-known trotting, 25
 Horses, 115
 Horses, buying, 49
 Houldsworth, Sir Wm., 69
 Hudson, T., Deputy town clerk,
 97, 98
 Hulse, Mr., 144
 "JEANNETTE and Jeannot," 10
 Justices of the Peace, 74-79
- KIDD, Rev. W. J., 18, 30, 102,
 103, 123, 124, 142
- LADS' Club, 98
 Lamps for councillors, 48
 Land needed for bridge, 68
 Longdendale water, 39
 Lapwing Lane, 55
 Latin or Welsh? 72
 Lawyers, 59, 72
 Leech, Sir Bosdin, 70, 71
 Liberal Club, 67
 Library at Old Parsonage, 151
 Library, Public, 98, 104, 145-152,
 166, 167, 174
 Local Board, 40-50, 52, 144
 Local Government Board, 70, 120
 Lord Mayor, The, 97, 114
 Lunn, Mr. Joe, 55
 Lynde, W. A., 64
- MACLURE, Sir J. W., 70, 71,
 74
 Magisterial duties, 75-79, 93
 Manchester Amateur Photographic Society, 49, 163, 164
 Manchester Carriage and Tramways Co. lease, 53-55
 Mare and filly, 42, 43
 Mark, Sir John, 24, 64
 Mason, Amos, 66, 98
 Mayday festivities, 115
 Mayes Charity, 69, 96, 175
 Mayor, Mr., 91
 Methodists, 12, 136
 Middleton, Dr., 22
 Midland Railway Co., 100
 Millgate, 112, 154, 155
 Milne brothers, 12
 Moore, Mr., 50, 52, 62, 66
 Mosley, Sir Edward., 99, 138
 Moss, Dr. W., 166
 Moulton, Dr., 97
 Murray, Peter, 70

- NATIONAL Schools, 99-103
 Natural history, 164, 165
 Neville, Mr., 4
 Newall family, 30
 Newspaper war, 59, 62
 Nonconformists, 102
 Norris, Mr., 95
- OAK furniture, 31, 160
 Oak settle, an old, 143
 Oak tree used for hanging, 12,
 13
 Old house in Millgate, 155
 Old Parsonage, 28-38, 97, 98,
 104, 105, 166, 174, 176-178
- PARIS, Matthew, 1
 Parish Registers, 13-15
 Parsons, 59, 60, 61, 99, 109, 128
 Parson's wig, to keep witches
 away, 162
 Photographic Society, 49, 163, 164
 Pigs, 171
 Pilgrims on the Dee, 137
 Plans, 107, 173
 Playing Fields, 104-108, 112-115,
 165, 168-172, 178
 Plummer, Ald. H., 98, 166
 Police Station, 58
 Policeman taken for ghost, 36
 Poor's field, 58-62, 68
 Porter, Counc. A., 98
 Post office, 12
 Pray till they sweat, 12
 Praying for fat bacon, 162-163
 Price, Counc., 72
 Property, offer of to Corporation,
 103-108, 112-115, 172-178
 Provis, Mr. Auctioneer, 57, 58
 Public Libraries Act not adop-
 ted, 55
 Punctuality, "Thief of time," 57
- QUOTATIONS, 2, 10, 17, 19, 36, 61,
 63, 64, 66, 67, 69, 72, 74, 87,
- 92, 93, 108, 110, 138, 142, 143,
 144, 147, 148, 178, 180, 181
- RABY, Robert, 55, 57
 Radicals and Tories, 9
 Railway, land for, 100
 Railway station, opening of, 28
 Randles, Rev. M., 64
 Rates, 9, 84
 Rates to pay for churchyard, 118-
 121
 Recreation ground, 45, 50, 56
 "Refreshments" for councillors,
 52, 53
 Rhodes, Dr., 64, 72, 79, 95-98
 Rifle Club, 126, 127
 Rifle practice, 10
 Rifleman's song, 10
 Ring o' Bells, 109, 128, 129
 River banks, Mersey, 38
 Roads, closing and narrowing, 40
 Robinson, Mr., 106
 Roby, Mr. A. G., 64, 101
 Roman Catholics, 102
 Rosebery, Lord, 2
 Rowlinson, A., 39
 Rowntree, Father, 97
 Royle or Ryle family, 4
 Royse, Lord Mayor, 114
 Rudd family, 4-6
 Rudd, John, 99
 Rush cart, 19-21
 Ruskin, John, 69, 147, 180
- ST. DAVID'S WELL, 8
 Sanitary Committee, 82
 School Lane, 101
 Schools, Didsbury, 99-103, 109
 Scotch Presbyterian, 102
 Sermons, 20, 124
 Shakspere, 69, 75, 178
 Shallow, Squire, 93
 Shann, Sir T., 98
 Simon, Henry, 61, 64, 68
 Simon, Mrs., 98

- Simony, 102
 Simpson, Councl. H. D., 98
 Slater, Rev. W. F., 64
 Sowler, F., 64
 Special Constables, 126
 Speeches, Five minute, 98
 Spread Eagle Hotel, 25, 80-82
 Standon Hall, 162, 175-177
 Stenner Broo Farm, 5, 132, 139,
 140
 Stenner Lane, 6, 112, 132, 168
 Statute of Mortmain, 103, 168
 Stockport, 2, 60
 Street, Jonathan, 41, 45
 Sun worship, 6
 Swarbrick, Councl., 72, 84, 86,
 87, 98
 Swarbrick, John, 104, 176, 179
- TALES of long ago, 154-161
 Themistocles, 94
 Thomason, Hannah, 4, 128
 Tolls and toll-bars, 28
 Tonge, Mrs. Canon, 59
 Tories, 9, 46, 55
 Tramcars, stoppage of, 54
 Trees and shrubs, 36-38
 Tunnicliff killed, 95
 Turnbull, Councl., 72
- URBAN District Council, 50-86
- VALUATIONS, 106, 168-175
 Vaudrey, Ald., 91
 Volunteers, 9, 10, 126
- Votes, counting, 91
 Voting, queer ways of, 44
- WAGGON with wooden axles, 176
 Wakes, The, 19-24
 Walker, Joseph, 54, 176
 Walking, good, 25
 Water, Manchester, 38, 39
 Water, supply of, 2-8
 Watt, John, 67, 90, 95, 126
 Watts, Betty, 132
 Watts, James, 9, 12, 64, 134-138
 Watts family, 132-138
 Watts, S. and J. & Co., 132, 133,
 138
 Welsh Baptist, 102
 Wesleyan College, 12
 West Didsbury, 48, 91
 "Whisky and cigars," 53, 57
 Wholesale provision dealers, 82, 83
 Wilmslow Turnpike Trust, 52
 Wilson family, 78
 Withington Urban District Coun-
 cil, 50-74, 79, 84
 Withington Urban District Coun-
 cil, elected chairman, 57
 Withington Urban District Coun-
 cil, tour of inspection, 70, 71
 Wood, Billy, 4, 142, 143
 Wood family, 139-144
 Wood, Thomas, 128, 134
 Wood's family gravestone, 122
- YATES, Mr., K.C., 77, 78
 Yates, Sam, 68

Other Books by Fletcher Moss

1890. A HISTORY OF DIDSBURY

1891. DIDSBURY IN THE '45

1894. CHRONICLES OF CHEADLE AND GATLEY

1898. FOLKLORE, OLD CUSTOMS AND TALES OF MY
NEIGHBOURS

Containing the folk-lore and customs relating to births, weddings, burials, festivals, ghosts, lawyers, doctors, parsons, school-masters, churchwardens, voters, &c. A meeting of the Local Board. Pilgrimages to the Royal Oak, Boscobel—Hawarden—Blore Heath—Beeston Castle—Peckforton Castle—Barthomley.

1901. PILGRIMAGES IN CHESHIRE AND SHROPSHIRE

Dutton Hall—Bunbury Church—Beeston Castle—Utkynton Hall—Farndon—Holt—Malpas—The Old Home of the Egertons—Vale Royal—Tabley Old Hall—Gawsworth—Marton Hall—Speke Hall—Battlefield (Shrewsbury)—Haughmond Abbey—Hodnet—Baguley Hall—Hawthorne Hall—Chorley Hall—Soss Moss Hall—Higher Peover—The Royal Oak—Tong—Whiteladies—Woolf's Barn (where the King hid)—Madeley-on-Severn—Atcham—Uriconium—Wroxeter—Buildwas Abbey—The Birthplace of the Prophet—Erbistock—Peels—Cheadle to Prestbury—Woodford Hall—Adlington Hall—Much Wenlock—Easthope—Acton Burnell—Ludlow—Stokesay—Bridgnorth—Dunvall—Shropshire—The best of Cheshire—Church Preen—Church Stretton—Frodesley Lodge—Clun—Diddlebury—Munslow—Millichope—Madeley in Staffordshire—On Pilgrims.

1903. PILGRIMAGES TO OLD HOMES MOSTLY ON THE
WELSH BORDER

Alderley—Audlem—Moss Hall—Mucklestone Wood—Ashley—Mees Hall—Ranton Abbey—Swynnerton—Hartington—Tissington—Whittington (the birthplace of Dick)—Jack Mytton's Halston—The End of the World and the Vale of the Cross—Albright Hussey—Preston Gubbals—Myddle—Moreton Corbet—The Home of the Herefords—Ludlow—Leinthall (where the Chicago bull was born)—Weobley (the most beautiful village in

OTHER BOOKS BY FLETCHER MOSS

England)—The Ley—Clifford Castle on the Wye—Rhyd Spence—Dorstone—Abbey Dore—Kilpeck—Ledbury—Much Marcle—Preston Court—Hereford—Ludlow—Ludford—Orleton Court—Lemster—Eardisland—Bosbury—Dormington Court—Allt-y-rwynys—Llanthony Abbey—Grosmont—Garway—Tintern Abbey—Monmouth—Goodrich Castle—Siddington—Astbury—Little Moreton Hall—Dieulaures Abbey—Leek—Saltersley—Montgomery Castle—Marrington Hall—Lymore, Chirbury—Powysland—Rhyd-y-carw—Talgarth—Park—Maesmawr—Penarth—Penrhos Hall—Trederwen—Trewern Hall—Warburton Old Church—Arley Hall—Minsterley Hall—Caus Castle—Marche Manor—Home of Old Parr of the Pills—Pitchford Hall—Treago Castle—Wythall Court—Manchester's Oldest Home—The Brereton Arms Inn—Shipton Hall, Shropshire—Norbury, Derbyshire—Carden Hall, Cheshire—Barlow Hall, Lancashire—Abney Hall.

1906. PILGRIMAGES TO OLD HOMES

Wells—Glastonbury—Walford Hall—Chartley and the Wild Cattle—Somerford Park—Tutbury—Croxden Abbey—The Standish Pew, Chorley—Houghton Tower—Wrexham—Yale—Bala—Vyrnwy—Haddon Hall—Bradford-on-Avon—Norton St. Philip—Muchelney—Athelney—Taunton—Crowcombe—Cleeve—Dunster—Exmoor Staghunting—Dulverton—Bath—Lytes Cary—Nunney Castle—South Wraxall—Great Chalfield—Stoke sub-Hamdon—Barrington Court—Bur—Dunster Castle—Compton Wynnyates—Baddesley Clinton—Wardley Hall (the House of the Skull)—Worcester—Tewkesbury—Birts-Morton—Huddington Court (the last home of the Gunpowder Plot)—Cleeve Prior—Evesham—Harvington Court—Handforth Hall—Park Hall, Oswestry—Slade Hall—The Riddings—Cock-fighting—The Old Parsonage, Didsbury.

1908. THE FOURTH BOOK OF PILGRIMAGES TO OLD HOMES

Hall i' th' Wood, where Sam Crompton invented the Spinning Jenny—Smithills Hall, the House of the Bloody Footmark—Sandbach Crosses—Old Hall with Dog-gates—Abbeyfield—Audley and the four Squires of Poictiers—Betley—Doddington—Wrinehill—Dutton—Broughton—Wybunbury—Barthomley—Mucklestone—The Land of Castles—Brecon to Pembroke—Crickhowell—Tretower—Brecon—The Yews of Llanspyddyd—Llandovery—Llandilo—Dryslwyn—Pembroke—Carew Cross—St. Davids (the best pilgrimage in Britain)—Conway—Plas Mawr—Gwydyr—Dolwyddelan—Harlech—Cors-y-Gedol—Cymmer—Hengwrt—Llanegryn—Dolau Gwyn—Arundel Castle—The Home of Noble Poverty, Winchester—Stonyhurst—Hardwick Hall—Norman Hall—Guardian dogs—Some of the Author's forbears

OTHER BOOKS BY FLETCHER MOSS

1910. THE FIFTH BOOK OF PILGRIMAGES TO OLD HOMES

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